

INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE



Basavaraj Naikar

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गुरुकुल कांगड़ी विश्वविद्यालय
कृपया पुस्तक के ऊपर कोई निशान आदि
न लगायें।

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पुस्तकालय

गुरुकुल कांगड़ी विश्वविद्यालय, हरिद्वार

122373

वर्ग संख्या.....

आगत संख्या.....

पुस्तक-विवरण की तिथि नीचे अंकित हैं। इस तिथि सहित ३०वें दिन यह पुस्तक पुस्तकालय में वापिस आ जानी चाहिए। अन्यथा ५० पैसे प्रति दिन के हिसाब से विलम्ब-दण्ड लगेगा।

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BASAVARAJ NAIKAR



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PREFACE

Indian English Literature has been growing quite fast in the last two decades. The creative writers, critics and publishers have contributed a great deal to the expansion of this literature. But in a multi-lingual country like India, Indian English Literature cannot be studied in isolation, because many Indian English writers happen to be bilingual and are nourished on native as well as foreign literary traditions. Hence, there is an urgent need for correlating the Indian regional literatures with Indian English literature so that broader patterns of thought and emotion can be discerned by critics on a comparative and contrastive basis. For example, the Indian critic who has a first hand knowledge of Sanskrit and folk narratology can analyse Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* better than a Eurocentric critic. Similarly it is possible to see aesthetic parallels and dissimilarities between Indian regional epics and Indian English epics or European epics. Linguistically exclusive approaches will only blinker the critical vision and paralyse the perspective. The Indian critic, therefore, should wake up from his complacency and try to interpret Indian English Literature side by side Indian regional literature in order to perceive a broader unity of national literature. It is with this belief and hope that at least some articles on Indian regional works have been included in this anthology. The Indian English writers included here range from the old ones like Swami Vivekananda to the latest ones like Jhumpa Lahiri, viewed from a variety of angles by a variety of critics.

Basavaraj Naikar attempts a comparative study of a seventeenth century Kannada epic, *Prabhulingalile* and a twentieth century Hindi epic, *Kamayani* and shows how both of them are philosophical in nature and have allegorical characters signifying abstract qualities. Charu Chandra Mishra offers a critical glance at Vivekananda's spiritual poetry and pleads for

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a serious study of his poetry. K.M. Pandey shows how cityscape happens to be one of the major thematic concerns in the poetry of Ezekiel, Pritish Nandy and Keki Daruwalla. M.A. Nare compares the poetry of Kamala Das and Nissim Ezekiel and concludes that whereas the poetry of Ezekiel is pornographic, that of Kamala Das is confessional. R.P. Lokhande analyses the major thematic concerns in Jayanta Mahapatra's *Dispossessed Nests* like the Punjab Turmoil, the Bhopal gas tragedy, commercialisation of politics, politicisation of religion, violence, rape, murder, abortion etc., which hold a mirror to the poet's contemporary consciousness. Basavaraj Naikar discusses how the eponymous hero of Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghasiram Kotwal* grabs power by surrendering his own daughter Gouri to Nanasaheb Fadanvis, but ironically becomes a puppet in the power-game of the latter and loses his life.

The articles on Indian English fiction outnumber those on other forms of literature in this anthology. Vibha Mishra problematises the Indian writer's use of English language with copious illustrations from Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Kamala Markandaya and suggests that the Indian writer has to forge his identity through the hybridity and inbetweenity of his experience. Rama Kundu highlights the mythical dimension of R.K. Narayan's *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* by seeing the binary opposite of Sura and Asura in the figures of Nataraj and Vasu. S.I. Nurani analyses the masculine world of Malgonkar's novels and shows how the heroes in his novels hail from the aristocratic strata of Indian society and how they develop their personality gradually through crises and suffering and finally achieve a sense of identity. Rudra Prasad Mahto discusses how Kamala Markandaya has depicted the English characters sympathetically in her novels and shown their dilemma between personal loyalty and political loyalty. Rashmi Sahi analyses the mother-daughter relationship in some of Shashi Deshpande's novels and shows how a woman has to be her own refuge which is hard to achieve. Parvati Bhatnagar taxonomizes the Indian women into three categories and shows how Shashi Deshpande advises them

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through her novel, *That Long Silence* to draw on their inner strength and achieve their sense of identity through a combination of tradition and modernity. Deepa Vanjani highlights Ruskin Bond's special attraction for Nature, especially mountains and trees which offer peace and solace to man. Ruskin Bond emerges as an environmentalist in his writings. Ashok Kumar Bachchan traces the influence of Indian English on Arun Joshi's language in terms of lexis, syntax and usage and compares Arun Joshi with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao in the process of nativization of English. Nivedita Maitra highlights the anti-feminist attitude of the women characters in Shobha De's *Starry Nights* and deplores their lack of self-respect, dignity and integrity. R.S. Pathak analyses the theme and technique of Boman Desai's *Asylum, USA* very perceptively. He points out the dilemmas and difficulties of the protagonist, Noshir faced by him in America around the sixties. Likewise he highlights Boman Desai's experimentation with language which is similar to Salman Rushdie's and Arundhati Roy's. Pashupati Jha and T. Ravichandran offer an in-depth analysis of Basavaraj Naikar's major thematic concerns and nativization of English in his *The Thief of Nagarahalli and Other Stories*. Tejinder Kaur discusses the diasporic experience of displacement, fragmentation, marginalisation and identity crisis undergone by the major characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's stories. Bhagabat Nayak analyses Jhumpa Lahiri's as well as her characters' multicultural commitment to India, USA, UK and other Commonwealth countries.

The various topics covered in this anthology are sure to awaken the reader's literary sensibility and expand the vista of his understanding.

BASAVARAJ NAIKAR
Editor

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1

The Allegorical Element in *Prabhulingalile* and *Kamayani* : A Comparative Study

—Basavaraj Naikar

THE EPIC happens to be the major form of poetic expression and that literature and philosophy are closely intertwined in India are evident in the large number of epics written in different languages of India. Though the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* happen to be the two major epics in Sanskrit, there is no dearth of epics in various regional languages. Although epic as a form of literature is said to have disappeared from the Western world of modern times, epics continue to be produced in India even in the twentieth century. In the present paper an attempt is made to study the allegorical element found in two regional epics *i.e.*, *Prabhulingalile* and *Kamayani* from a comparative perspective.

Prabhulingalile (*The Frolic Play of the Lord*) is a religious epic written in Kannada by Camarasa in fifteenth century, whereas *Kamayani* is a mythical epic written in Hindi by Jaya Shankar Prasad in 1935. Since both of these epics are philosophical in nature, they are closely connected with religion and mythology accepted by their respective writers. The philosophical element informing these epics naturally affects their technique substantially. Since the story, which includes characters, events and contexts is an illustration of the philosophical framework; the epic poets have to resort to allegorical technique.

"An allegory is a narrative in which the agents and action, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived not only to make sense in themselves, but also to signify a second correlated order of persons, things, concepts or events."¹ Allegory may be classified into two categories : (1) historical or political allegory and (2) the allegory of ideas. The two epics under discussion easily fall into these two categories. Whereas the historical allegory is based on real persons of history, the allegory of ideas contain characters who represent abstract concepts and its plot serves to communicate a doctrine or thesis.² *Prabhulingalile* may be described as basically a historical epic invested with a deep religious significance. It deals with the life of a historical figure called Allamaprabhu (or Prabhudeva) who is accepted by Camarasa as an incarnation of Lord Siva and who tantalizes and defeats Maya, an incarnation of the dark (*tamasik*) aspect of Goddess Parvati. But Goddess Parvati wins the wager only when she sends Mahadevi, an incarnation of her harmonious (*sattvik*) aspect to the mortal world to encounter Allama, the human incarnation of Lord Siva. Similarly *Kamayani* deals with the life of Manu, Father of Mankind, who is torn between Shraddha and Ida until he reaches the last phase when he realizes that happiness consists in the harmonization of knowledge, devotion and action and in the identification of self with non-self and the entire humanity. Thus both the epics project a picture of life which is at once religious, mythical, philosophical and idealistic although marginally based on the facts, characters and events of history. One common feature of both the epics happens to be that even when the characters and events are borrowed from the real world, they become the allegorical instruments of a philosophical framework in accordance with the poets' respective convictions. For example, *Prabhulingalile* is informed with Virasaiva philosophy and *Kamayani* is infused with the dominant features of Kashmir Saivism. A few of the predominant features of the two epics may be examined briefly in the following paragraphs.

Most of the major characters in both the epics are allegorical in the sense that they represent qualities. The concept of *maya*

or illusion happens to be an important theme of *Prabhulingalile*. The poet offers three aspects or dimensions of *maya* in the epic.³ The first dimension of *maya* can be seen at the very beginning of the epic where Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati in Kailasa discuss the concept of *maya*. Their discussion reveals that the very phenomenon invested with Name (*Nama*), Form (*Rupa*) and Action (*Kriya*) happens to be an expression of *maya*.

The second dimension of *maya* is revealed allegorically through the character of Maya or Mayadevi. The names of her parents are allegorical. Her father is called 'Mamakara' which means 'worldly attachment' and her mother is called 'Mohini' which means a 'bewitcher' or 'mesmeriser.' The epic describes how when Maya was born, the minds of not only ordinary people, but of even monks, saints and yogis were disturbed and distracted by the magnetic power of her feminine (sexual) charm. Here *maya* represents not only the disturbing things and beings like land, lady and gold but also the subjective tendency of being disturbed by such objects of attraction. Thus *maya* can be both objective and subjective. It is not necessary that only human beings are subject to *maya*, but even gods and demons may be equally enslaved by *maya*. Maya or Mayadevi who is a young princess who falls in love with Allama the drum-player at the Madhukeswara Temple of Banavasi, represents the object of attraction for Allamaprabhu (or Prabhudeva). But Allama, being a super-Sarana and super-yogi, who has attained the pinnacle of mystic and metaphysical enlightenment, cannot be attracted by Mayadevi's sexual magnetism. (He hails from a spiritually oriented family. His parents bear allegorical names. His father, for example, is called 'Nirahankara' which means 'a man without ego' and his mother, 'Sujnani' which means 'a sensible or wise one.') In other words there is no meeting point between the objective *maya* (represented by Princess Maya) and the subjective *maya* (represented by Allama's remarkable self-control). When she sends for Allama and tries to rope him in, he refuses to yield to her. Finally when she tries to embrace him, he disappears from there by his yogic powers. She is frustrated

to hug the empty air. Her defeat is complete now. Goddess Girija grows anxious about the non-return of Maya to Kailasa and therefore, sends a messenger called Vimala to supervise the efficiency and result of Maya's role. But when Vimala comes to the earth she is rather disappointed to see that Maya, instead of trapping Allama into her love, is passionately entangled with him although there is absolutely no response from him. Vimala is even forced by Mayadevi to appeal to Allama for his love. But Allama, being a *Sivayogi* of sterling spirituality, turns down her request :

Where is the relation between passion and the Absolute Principle? Where is the relation between darkness and the lotus-companion (the Sun)? Where is the relation between amnesia and Awareness? Enough of your illusory words. Where is the relation between your puny self and the Lord Supreme? You fool! Better go back the way you have come over.⁴

Embarrassed and insulted by Allamaprabhu, Vimala returns to Kailasa along with Mayadevi.

Goddess Parvati is really humiliated by the defeat. But, however, she is bent on testing her lord. She, therefore, sends the incarnation of her harmonious or orderly (*sattvik*) aspect to the mortal world to take birth there. Accordingly she is born in the mortal world and is named as 'Mahadevi' which means 'the supreme goddess.' Her parents are given allegorical names. Her father is called 'Nirmala' which means a 'pure or flawless one.' Her mother is called 'Sumati' which means a 'wise or learned one.' The whole atmosphere in which she is born and bred is shot with spirituality quite in tune with her inborn tendency. She grows up into a beautiful young lady, but far from being entangled in the net of worldly passions, she develops a spiritual aptitude precociously and walks about almost naked with only her long tresses to cover her body, in search of her personal god Cennamallikarjuna. On the way she encounters Allamaprabhu in the Mystic Academy (*Anubhava Mantapa*) at Kalyana and successfully passes the spiritual test offered by Allama and other *Saranas* by answering all their questions in a highly sophisticated

manner. Allamaprabhu is deeply impressed by her 'detachment' (*vairagya*) and passion for 'spirituality' and congratulates her whole-heartedly. Mahadevi turns out to be an elder sister or a model for all the *Saranas* there. Now Goddess Parvati's vow of winning Lord Siva through the incarnation of her bright or orderly aspect is fulfilled.

The central theme of *Prabhulingalile* happens to be Allamaprabhu's achievement of spiritual salvation through the rigorous discipline of Virasaiva brand of *Sivayoga*. He meets a number of spiritual aspirants belonging to different religious sects and converts them ideologically to his own school by showing the inadequacy of their systems. He, for example, converts Goggayya, Goraksanatha, Marulusankaradeva, Muktayakka and Siddharama to his own path of *Sivayoga*. Then he goes to the Mystic Academy at Kalyana and appreciates the spiritual activities of all the *Saranas* including Basaveswara. Finally he blesses them and goes away from there. Thus *Prabhulingalile* justifies the frolic play of the Absolute Lord which includes the descent on the earth in the human form and the ascent to Heaven through spiritual detachment and elevation. Allama teaches the believers how man can conquer *maya* and attain the height of spiritual liberation and bliss through the practice of *Sivayoga* and the hierarchical path of *Sat-Sthala* of spiritual ascent. Camarasa who was one of the hundred and one famous *Sivayogis* in the reign of Proudhadevaraya had internalized the quintessence of the countless mystical-cum-metaphysical *vacanas* (utterances) of Allamaprabhu was inspired to present his life with a missionary zeal. The picture of Allamaprabhu that emerges from Camarasa's epic is one of highest spiritual attainment (*siddhi*) comparable to that of Bhagavan Buddha.

Like *Prabhulingalile*, *Kamayani* also has a dominant allegorical pattern in it. Most of the characters in it bear allegorical names and indicate a philosophical pattern, which Jaya Shankar Prasad wanted to project through the story. The protagonist of the epic happens to be Manu who easily symbolizes Man (endowed with a mind) in general and the

human predicament. Although Prasad has borrowed the character of Manu from a variety of mythical or *puranic* sources, he has given him his own individual touch. Manu is not a particular individual but a representative of the Universal Man as conceived by the Hindu myths. Because of the element of individuality, Manu might be taken as a representative of modern man as well. He is a prototype of Man easily comparable to Adam of the *Paradise Lost*.

Kamayani begins with an apocalyptic vision of the flood, tempest and the *tandava*-dance of fire. After the subsiding of the elemental turbulence, Manu celebrates the first dawn by conducting a sacrifice. Consequently, some kind of hope for life begins to lurk in him. It is at this opportune time that Shraddha meets him and brings a new hope to his existence. 'Shraddha' is obviously an allegorical character signifying 'faith' or 'devotion.' The names of Shraddha's parents are also allegorical. Kama and Rati who happen to be her father and mother respectively symbolize the male and female aspects of sex and the polarities of the cosmos. Creation of things and beings of the universe is possible only through the mating of these two poles of sexuality. This view is, obviously, part of the Hindu cosmology.

Since Manu is one who is endowed with a mind (*manas*), he cannot help exercising it. He, therefore, meditates upon life in general and Kama's message in particular. He watches the element of passion in Nature. The name of Lajja who is a modern version of divine Rati is allegorical and means 'shyness' which makes women think of the pros and cons of sex or procreation and protects women's chastity and beauty. Lajja, like Rati, remains invisible. It is Lajja who prevents Shraddha from yielding to Manu for sex. But Manu who is under the intoxicating influence of *somarasa* is urged by an uncontrollable sexual hunger forces Shraddha into sex. Helpless as she is, Shraddha surrenders herself to him completely. After enjoying sex with her, he begins to lose interest in her as he finds her rather insipid. He indulges in hunting and slaughter to refresh himself. While wandering without any goal, he chances to reach

Saraswat, the city of Ida. The name of the city 'Saraswat' is allegorical and suggests 'knowledge' or 'learning.' Ida is the beautiful queen of the kingdom. The name 'Ida' is also allegorical which indicates human 'intellect.' Now Manu who has run away from Shraddha is befriended by Ida who tries to sympathize with his plight and urges him to join her in rehabilitating her kingdom. Thus Manu has temporarily forsaken the life of devotion or faith and is attracted by the intellectual life of reflection. Shraddha who is pregnant and forsaken by Manu dreams about him. And her dream has a parallel to reality. Manu who has become the ruler of the kingdom of Saraswat has started violating the laws himself. He does not care for Ida's reminders about it. When he continues to violate the laws, he has to face the rebels like Kilata and Akuli who have left his service and joined the rebellious gang. Again Ida requests him to stop the war and restore peace, but Manu turns a deaf ear to her. Though he kills Kilata and Akuli in the war, he is finally hit by an arrow and falls in a pool of blood. When he opens his eyes he is stupefied to find Shraddha and his own son Kumar. He wants to take revenge against Ida but cannot do so in the presence of Shraddha. So he goes away from them when all the three of them are asleep. But Shraddha leaves Kumar with Ida and goes in search of Manu. She finally finds him and tells him that she has tried to redeem his sins through Kumar's renunciation. Then she leads him to the Himalaya and explains the three worlds, *i.e.*, of desire, of action and of knowledge allegorically indicated by red, pale and silvery colours. She also points out how the three worlds are not harmonized and remain apart from one another. Then Manu sits immersed in deep meditation near the Manasarovara Lake on the Himalaya. He seems to have attained self-realization. When Ida and Kumar go there, he accepts them and explains how at that place all are but members of one family and how happiness consists in the service of and love for others. Everybody now feels that he or she is happier and wiser than ever before. *Kamayani* like *Prabhulingalile* ends on a note of affirmation.

Both *Prabhulingalile* and *Kamayani* present the poets' philosophical vision through allegorical technique. Camarasa projects the Virasaiva ideal of how man like Allamaprabhu can conquer *maya* or illusion by the practice of *Sivayoga* through the Six-Phase-Path (*Sat-Sthala Marga*). Although *Sivayoga* is not essentially different from Patanjali's yoga, it follows not the eight-part-path, but the six-phase-path typical of Virasaiva spiritual discipline. The six-phase-path consists of the gradual ascent of human soul through the six stages of *Bhakta*, *Mahesa*, *Prasadi*, *Pranalingi*, *Sarana* and *Aikya*. The Virasaiva philosophy was a strong reaction to the Vedic brahmanism of earlier times and galvanised by the *Saranas* including Basaveswara and Allamaprabhu. Camarasa who was also a Virasaiva poet who wanted to uphold his faith through poetry wrote *Prabhulingalile* in accordance with his new aesthetics. The traditional Kannada poets believed in the descriptions of eighteen situations (without caring for their relevance or otherwise) and in the delineation of heroic sentiment (*Vira rasa*) as the predominant one. But Camarasa's aesthetics was radically different from the traditional one in that he did not believe in delineating the mortal heroes and their physical heroism in his epic. On the contrary he believed that his epic is :

Neither the story of the dead, nor that of those who have repeatedly gone through a variety of births or subjected to the darkness of *karma*; nor the story meant to be listened to by rowdies for killing their time; nor the symposium of the dull-witted. This epic *The Frolic Play of the Lord* is meant to be understood by *Saranas* seeking the Truth.⁵

Then Camarasa highlights the theme of his epic in the light of his aesthetics :

I am going to narrate the righteous life of Allamaprabhu in a befitting language to be understood by one and all. Those who can enjoy the melody inside the words, those who have sensitive hearts and those who know the importance of devotion may listen to *The Frolic Play of the Lord*.⁶

Like Camarasa, Jaya Shankar Prasad also has his own aesthetics. His *Kamayani* is an allegorical expression of his philosophy of bliss called *Anandavad*. He rejected Sankaracarya's philosophy of *maya* called *Mayavad* and believed in the Kashmir Saivism and considered bliss superior to peace.⁷ The technique employed in the epic happens to be that of *Chhayavad* which was synonymous with Romanticism and which was borrowed from the Bengali *Rahasyavad* or mysticism. It depicts the spiritual journey of Manu through different stages of life like search, doubt, confusion and final enlightenment. Manu is finally able to harmonize devotion and intellect and achieve a sense of detachment and selflessness thereby enjoying the highest bliss or *ananda* of life. As Girija Kumar Mathur rightly observes, "Manu the pivotal character of *Kamayani* experiences this struggle between the ideal and the real, faith and logic, fact and fantasy, emotion and action. The conflict would become never-ending if one aspect of the human personality is emphasized or recognized, ignoring the other. Prasad resolved this conflict in his message of the ultimate *Anandvad* (Philosophy of Bliss) which meant the complete integration and balance of human personality, his life and living."⁸

Thus both *Prabhulingalile* and *Kamayani* happen to be allegorical epics giving expression to their distinctive philosophical visions. But the dissimilarities between the two are also to be noticed. Whereas the allegorical pattern of *Prabhulingalile* is based upon the solid historical characters and situations of the twelfth century Karnataka, that of *Kamayani* is based entirely on the mythical or *Puranic* characters and events without a solid foundation of historical reality. Although *Prabhulingalile* is bracketed by mythical discussion between Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati, the major events connected with Maya, Mahadevi, Basaveswara, Siddharama and Allamaprabhu are historical ones belonging to the twelfth century Karnataka. But *Kamayani* does not have a solid foundation of history. On the contrary it is based upon the mythical or apocalyptic vision. Manu as depicted by Prasad is more a mythical figure than a

historical one. Comparatively speaking, Allamaprabhu is more convincing as a protagonist because of his historicity. The events of *Prabhulingalile* are in line with the law of probability, but those of *Kamayani* are totally fantastic and arbitrary and hence acceptable only on ideological and allegorical level. Whereas *Prabhulingalile* was occasioned by the historical necessity of a new religion of Virasaivism to fight the old Vedic or ritualistic religion, *Kamayani* is not occasioned by any historical necessity, although one can see some contemporary parallels in it.

But *Kamayani*, although not based upon any particular historical event, has a wider ideological appeal than *Prabhulingalile* because of its affinity to the pan-Hindu philosophy. It can easily be compared with the *Bible* and the *Paradise Lost* in its mythical but universal relevance. But *Prabhulingalile* might be compared with *The Fairy Queen* in which the characters like Gloriana, although allegorical in significance are based upon historical figures like Queen Elizabeth.

There are other dissimilarities also between the two epics. Whereas *Prabhulingalile* has many lengthy passages devoted to the description of *Sivayoga* in addition to the central pattern of events, *Kamayani* has many lengthy passages devoted to the description of Nature. Whereas *Prabhulingalile* has a reflective tone, *Kamayani* has a lyrical tone about it. In the use of language also the two epics differ from each other. *Prabhulingalile* is composed in *Bhamini Satpadi* (six-line stanza) metre in Mediaeval Kannada, *Kamayani* is composed in the Khariboli of the post-Dwivedi era, through a variety of metres like *tatank*, *saara*, *padpadakulck* etc.

The two epics depict the success, glory and happiness attained by their respective protagonists i.e., Allamaprabhu and Manu. Though allegorical technique is a feature commonly shared by the two epics, they differ in their emphasis. Whereas *Prabhulingalile* may be described as a religious epic, *Kamayani* may be viewed as a mythical epic. These two epics of Kannada

and Hindi languages invite comparison with the epics of other languages of India.

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2

Ruminations of a Monk : A Reading of Vivekananda's Poetry

—Charu Chandra Mishra

TO KNOW Swami Vivekananda from his eloquent lectures on Hindu philosophy is but to know only a small measure of his true power and greatness. Vivekananda, the man of the world, the friend, the patriot, the loving master, the desperate seeker of knowledge comes out more profoundly in his poetic utterances. The varied mood of the poet, which is reflected in his poetry displays the vivacity and eloquence of a master artist. While it brings out the spiritual quest of a monk on one hand, it also expresses, the conflicting feelings and emotions of a man thrown on the material world, on the other. No other poet of his time stands out so distinctly in his rumination over life and death. His most brilliant flashes of eloquence, his utterances of profoundest wisdom are all poured and moulded in to shape his rare poetry. The significance of this great Sannyasi's poetry lies in its relevance to his own as well as our time. Even after a whole century has passed, the values of culture and moral philosophy propagated by him, above all, those of life which he holds out for the harmony of Eastern and Western world invites a fresh reading of his poetry.

Indian English poetry owes its origin to the first publication of 'Poems' by Henry Derozio in 1827. The literary critics often tend to categorise the gamut of Indian English poetry as pre-independence and post-independence poetry. Unfortunately most of them denigrate the former. Even so celebrated a poet like R. Parthasarthy rejects it and pronounces that Indian English

verse "did not seriously begin to exist till after the withdrawal of the British from India" (Parthasarathi, 1976, p. 3). Keki N. Daruwalla goes one step ahead in an introduction to his anthology *Two Decades of Indian Poetry 1960-1980* and writes : "I must say here that it is fairly easy to denigrate what ever the earlier Indian poets wrote and then contrast their failures with modern Indian Poetry in English." Despite such extreme views from the modern poets and critics the pre-independence Indian English poetry merits its place in the annals of Indian English literature for the sheer innovation and continuity that they provide for its existence. A critic like V.K. Gokak in his introduction to *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Verse* and in his *Studies in Indo-English Poetry* traces the growth and progress of Indian English poetry and showers praises on those like Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo.

Of all the critics of Indian English Poetry, the only authentic voice which emphasizes the importance of the 19th century Indian English poetry is that of Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar. He considers those like Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-1884), Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), Kashinath Trimbak Telang (1850-1893), Madhav Govind Ranade (1842-1901), Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886), Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) and Phirozshah Mehta (1848-1915) as having contributed a lot to the renaissance in India. In his introduction to *Indian Writing in English* he writes :

We cannot list Rammohun Roy and Ranade, Vivekananda and Aurobindo, Tilak and Gokhale, Tagore and Gandhi in the calendar of our prophets and poets, and yet cultivate a blind antipathy towards the language they used as their forceful means of communicating their meaning and message to India and the world. These stalwarts were among the makers of the modern India, and what they said and wrote must therefore be cherished as our national literature. (Iyengar, 1962, p. 15)

All these spiritual leaders were born in a time when the East had met West through the British East Indian Company which had later wrested the rein of power from the people of India.

Through their spiritual movement they had tried to effect moral and social courage in the eastern ways as much as the Theosophical Society of Annie Besant did in the western ways. "But none of these movements — neither the Brahmo Samaj nor the Theosophical Society, neither the Arya Samaj nor the Prarthana Samaj — was really effective or final answer to the 'challenge' from the west, which, paradoxically enough, had a Janus-face; the face of English education and its sense of power and the face of Jesus Christ and its transcendent light of holiness" (Iyengar, 1962, p. 51). When the doubting Hindu was to be made to 'believe' Ramakrishna Paramahansa occurred at the nick of time in whom Romain Rolland saw "the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people."

The occurrence of Ramakrishna meant no turning back on the west, on the other hand, "he made it possible for the Indian intellectual to take the best that the west had to give him, yet not give up the spiritual heritage of his forefathers" (Iyengar, 1962, p. 52). For one who knew no language other than his mother tongue the onus of conveying his message to the world rested upon his chief disciple Swami Vivekananda. It was he who established the Ramakrishna Mission, a spiritual and humanitarian movement to let every Indian feel proud of his roots. In the words of Sri Aurobindo the real roots of ancient India's greatness were "an ingrained and dominant spirituality, an inexhaustible vital creativeness and gust of life and, mediating between them, a powerful, penetrating and scrupulous intelligence combined with the rational, ethical and aesthetic mind each at a high intensity of action." It would be in no way an exaggeration to say that the spirit, the intellect and the life-impulse, all function in Vivekananda at the highest pitch and yet working in the closest collaboration seated Vivekananda in the highest virtue of spiritual India. His writing and speeches are spread over many volumes in which "he speaks with knowledge as well as conviction and a sense of urgency, and he was a very effective speaker, bold, audacious, fluent, and essentially educative," writes Iyengar.

"Death was not then, nor immortality,
 The night was neither separate from day,
 But motionless did *That* vibrate
 Alone, with Its own glory one —
 Beyond *That* nothing did exist.

The "Creative Energy above" put forth by 'Tapah', which runs "with self-sustaining principle below" is held, perchance by "He, the Ruler in the supreme sky" surmises the poet as any other epic poet of Europe.

In a poem like "On the Sea's Bosom" composed during his return from the second trip abroad while crossing the eastern Mediterranean Vivekananda seems to be at his poetic best like any other English romantic poet in his description of the varied images in a colourful sky with myriad drifting clouds :

"There light clouds spread, heaping up spun cotton;
 See next a huge snake, then a strong lion;
 Again, behold a couple locked in love;
 All vanish, at last, in the vapoury sky."

More ennobling than this is his gifted ears which home bound listens to the varied music coming from below the sea and with an undertone of patriotism records :

"Below, the sea sings a varied music,
 But not grand, O India, nor ennobling :
 Thy waters, widely praised, murmur serene
 In soothing cadence, without a harsh roar."

While the Victorian poet Arnold's sea heaves with "tremulous cadence slow" and "harsh grating roar" bringing the eternal note of sadness in emphasizing the erosion of faith, for Vivekananda too though it is "in soothing cadence without a harsh roar" fails to inspire him and its message seems to be less "grand" and 'ennobling' than does his dear motherland India.

Though such patriotic fervour abounds in Vivekananda's relationship toward his homeland, as a saint and a liberated soul, he sings of freedom of each and every land. His poem "To the Fourth of July" written in the anniversary of American Declaration of Independence in 1898 celebrates the liberty as

much as it sings for the sacrifice of the many for the achievement of this much cherished goal :

"All hail to thee, thou Lord of Light!
A welcome new to thee, today,
O Sun! today thou sheddest *Liberty*!
Be think how the world did wait,
And search for thee through time and clime.
Some gave up home and love of friends,
And in quest of thee self-banished,
Through dreary oceans, through primeval forests,
Each step a struggle for their life or death;
And worship, love and sacrifice,
Fulfilled, accepted, complete
Then thou propitious, rose to shed
The light of *Freedom* on Mankind.

The final lines of the poem teems with the poet's cosmopolitan and philanthropic love, which prays selflessly for the blessing of 'Freedom' allover the earth, for every man and woman with its benediction of material and spiritual joy :

"Move on, O Lord, in thy resistless path!
Till thy high noon o'erspreads the world.
Till every land reflects thy light,
Till men and women, with uplifted head,
Behold their shackles broken, and
Know, in springing joy their life renewed!"

Man is bound by the Karma (Action) he performs, reaping positive or negative result in accordance to his Karma. Such is the message of the Hindu scriptures like *The Upanishad* and *The Gita*. During his sojourn in New York on 16th May 1895 Vivekananda undergoes a lot of mental anguish after looking at the turbid ebb and flow of life, where, "I feel my Karma's sway" and where :

"Love comes reflected back as love,
Hate breeds more fierce hate,
They mete their measures, lay on me
Through life and death their claim;"

A seeker of eternal truth, the poet cherishes to go beyond this sway of Karma, relinquishing both life and death he seeks his repose in his "Awakened Soul" :

'One only man, one only God, one ever perfect soul,
One only sage who ever scorned the dark dubious ways,
One only man who dared think and dared show the
goal —
That *death* is curse, and so is *life* and best when stops to
be."

A poem like "Kali the Mother", in the words of Iyengar, is almost "an apocalyptic vision of the breaking of the Worlds and the Dance of Doom :

"The stars are blotted out
The clouds are covering clouds,
It is darkness vibrant, sonant,
In the roaring, whirling wind
Are the souls of a million lunatics, —
Just loose from the prison house, —"

While the lines quoted above depict an eerie world as frenzid and terrorising as the Yeatsian world of 'The Second Coming' with its sphinx like image of "A shape with lion body and head of a man...moving its slow thighs" that "slouches towards Bethelham to be born?" the following lines evoke almost a Shelleyian world throbbing with the destructive power of the Westwind. Vivekananda's depiction is equally powerful in its "evocation of the frenzy of the creatrix who turns the destroyer of the world" :

"Wrenching trees by the roots,
Sweeping all from the path.
The sea has joined the fray
And swirls of mountain waves,
To reach the pitchy sky.
The Flash of lurid light
Reveal on every side.
A thousand, thousand shades
Of death begrimmed and black-
Scattering plague and sorrows,
Dancing mad with Joy."

Despite such apocalyptic vision, there is unwavering faith on the part of the poet in the future life of man which gushes forth unchecked, unstinted in a poem like "Who knows how Mother Plays" :

"To child may glories ope
Which father never dreamt;
May thousand fold in daughter
Her powers Mother store."

To Vivekananda all the religion of the world seems to be shrouded with mystery and its architectural and scriptural emblems form a 'wild forest' in which he feels like a lost child in his search for 'God' as he records in his poem "Epistles" :

"In temple, church, and mosque
In Vedas, Bible, Al Koran
I had searched for Thee in vain.
Like a child in the wild forest lost."

But this confusion and 'lost' feeling ultimately leads to a Wordsworthian pantheistic vision and the poet finds 'God' in a prophetic moment in a flash of illumination in his heart of heart and he joyfully exclaims :

"And you are here, my love, my all!
And I was searching Thee!
From all eternity you were there
Enthroned in majesty!"

The revelation enchants and bemuses the life of the poet for ever and he sees the presence of God every where :

"When innocent children laugh and play
I see Thee standing by
When holy friendship shakes the hand,
He stands between them too;
He pours the nectar in Mother's kiss
And the baby's sweet "Mama."

Finally the poet's affirmation of life through his awakening leads him to acknowledge the Omnipresent in the voice of prophets and the songs of scriptures :

"Thou wert my God with prophets old;
 All creeds do come from Thee;
 The Vedas, Bible, and Koran bold
 Sing Thee in harmony."

Such knowledge of spiritual truth, holds a message for the present-day messiahs of various religions who have misdirected the masses through their interpolation of religion on orthodox line. These religious leaders seem to have lost their religion in the 'wild forest' of fundamentalism of communalism. Vivekananda's message in this context is pretty clear and emphasizes the 'soul' illuminating aspect of religion, its inspiration for a highly spiritual life as a seeker of the truth, the 'God.'

In all these poems and a few more like 'Angels Unaware', 'To the Awakened India,' 'The Songs of Sannyasin' Vivekananda appears more as a poet philosopher whose serious side of intellect is more apparent. However this great Sannyasin turns out to be a comic genius in some of his epistolary poems, which are written with his simultaneous intention as a 'seeker of truth' and a 'spiritual guide.' In "An Interesting Correspondence", addressed to Mary Hale he comes out in his dramatic and poetic best, when he declares in his characteristic prophetic style :

"Nor angel I nor man, nor brute,
 Nor body, mind, nor he or she,
 The books do stop in wonder mute
 To tell my nature; I am He."

To him she replies with her humorous contriteness :

"The monk he would a poet be
 And wooed the muse right earnestly;
 In thought and word he could well bear her,
 What bothered him though was the meter."

To her reply that he has made them clearly see the one main truth that "all is He", the Swami replies mirthfully, though with his serious tone :

"So Mary Hale,
 Allow me tell,

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You mar my doctrines wronging, baulking.
I never taught
Such queer thought
That all was God — unmeaning talking!"

His description of the nature of Mary Hale a "quick tempered girl with her feelings deep" brings out not only the funny side of the Swami's character but also the extent to which he enjoyed human relationship as a brother and a spiritual guide :

"Tho' many a lay her muse can bray,
And play piano too,
Her heart so cool, chills as a rule
The fool who comes to woo."

And he further chides her :

"Though, Sister Mary, I hear they say
The sway your beauty gains,
Be cautious now and do not bow,
However sweet, to chains.
For it will be soon, another tune
The moon-struck mate will hear
If his will but clash, your words will hush
And smash his life I fear."

The editor of *The Complete Works of Vivekananda* rightly remarks, that in this poem, "the Swami is seen in a new light, playful and intensely human, yet keyed to the central theme of his life, Brahmajnana." The Swami is equally eloquent, humane and inspiring in his praises to sister Nivedita in his poem like "A Benediction" and to his western and eastern disciples in 'The Living God', 'To An Early Violet', 'Thou Blessed Dream' and 'Light.' In addition to these, in a few more poems like 'Requiescat in Pace' written in memorium to J.J. Goodwin and 'Hold on yet a while, Brave Heart' addressed to H.H. The Maharaja of Khetri, Rajputana Vivekananda like a 'sensitive' person shows his gratitude for their kindness during his struggling days and showers his praises and blessings on them for their continuous effort to help the suffering mankind.

To the present world that has suffered several onslaught of war, repeated cycles of birth and death the Swami's poem

'Peace' composed at Ridgely Manor, New York, 1889 holds out a spiritual solace :

"It is sweet rest in music
And pause in sacred art;
The silence between speaking;
Between two fits of passion —
It is the calm of heart.

* * *

It is beauty never seen
And love that stands alone,
It is song that lives un-sung,
And knowledge never known
It is death between two lives,
And lull between two storms
The void whence Rose creation
And that is where it returns."

Equally characteristic of the Swami are some of the English verse rendering he made from his own Bengali to name a few, 'To a Friend', 'The Dance of Shiva', 'Shiva in Ecstasy', 'To Shri Krishna', 'A Hymn to Shri Ramakrishna', 'Nirvanashatakam', 'The Hymn of Creation', 'Of Samadhi', 'To the Divine Mother', 'To Shiva', 'And Let Shyama Dance There' are some of the momentous poetic works which authenticate the teeming, bubbling spirit of a man, a poet, above all, of a saint.

To the generation of man at the dawn of twenty-first century, Vivekananda's clarion call after its 'twenty centuries of stony sleep' and 'vexed dream' is to :

"Awake, arise, and dream no more!
...Be bold, and face
The truth! Be one with it! Let visions cease,
Or, if you can not, dream but truer dreams,
which are Eternal Love and Service Free."

Finally the contribution of poets like Vivekananda to Indian English poetry must not be judged just by comparing them to any of our modern poet as Keki N. Daruwala does when he says, "the final indictment of the earlier poets will not be on the score of their prosody or their archaic, dandified georgianisms, but that

they were untouched by either the reality around them, drought, famine, plague, colonial exploitation or by the reality within, namely erosion of faith and the disintegration of the modern consciousness." It is generally known that a poet like Wordsworth whose poetry is untouched by the events of his day either political or social has as dignified a 'place' in the annals of English poetry as any other later poet like T.S. Eliot or W.H. Auden. To be more precise, Vivekananda and his contemporaries deserve to be given their due place in the history of Indian English Literature, not only for effecting, a renaissance in it but also for their critical endeavour to record their ruminations, their feelings and emotions in a language completely alien from their own.

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3

Cityscape in Indian English Poetry*—K.M. Pandey*

CITYSCAPE HAS been an obsession with the 20th century literature and Indian English poets are no exception to this. This is so because the city is often "the bizarre mixture of culture and nature."¹ It is something fully knowable and not yet known. The city envelops its citizens by wrapping its walls around them and creating a sense of community. The city attracts the poets because of its double condition : "the random and the systematic, the visible and the obscured, which is the true significance of the city...as a dominant social form."² The city has been the source of those qualities that we name with the city born words like civility, civilization and urbanity. Cicero had this in mind when he said that "among all things done upon earth, nothing is more agreeable to the eyes of those who rule the universe than societies of men founded upon respect for laws, which we call cities."³ Ironically, this civilized place has also been the source of all kinds of inhuman activities. There has been a vast chasm between the conceptual and the real city. It is a place where everything is both available and vanishing thus converting the city into a stage where staging itself occurs.

The city is an "interesting collage"⁴ and its variety and cultural patterns cannot be erased. This is the place where economic activities are at their fastest speed. Opportunities of employment, education, business and entertainment are predominantly available within the city. Naturally, a large number of people from the countryside as well as the nearby areas come to city in the hope of developing their future. This

results in the congestion of space and widens the gap between the rich and the poor. Today it is the city where richness and poverty are at their extremes. If on the one hand, we have skyscrapers having all modern amenities and a few people to reside within them, on the other, we have a large number of slums having people whose basic needs are also not fulfilled. Plato had this in mind when he said, "Any city, however small, is in fact divided into two, the city of the poor and the city of the rich; they are at war with one another."⁵

Indian English poets are preoccupied with the reality that is the city. Thus Mumbai is well represented in the poems of Nissim Ezekiel, Arun Kolatkar, Adil Jussawalla, Kamala Das, Dilip Chitre etc. Ezekiel⁶ is primarily an urban poet and his poems exhibit the disagreeable qualities of the urban landscape which are symbolic of the stresses on the mind while a pastoral vision of the countryside suggests innocence and a clear perspective on life. His poem "Urban" is based on the contrast between the distant hills symbolizing purity and relief and the city's routine street traffic and noise, which is associated with the clamour of his family :

The hills are always far away
He knows the broken roads, and moves
In circles tracked within his head.
Before he wakes and has his say,
The river which he claims he loves
Is dry, and all the winds lie dead.

Another poem, "A Morning Walk", refers to the highways and byways which cross one another. The city is "Cold and dim/ where only human hands sell cheap." The city is seen as purgatory :

Barbaric city sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums,
A million purgatorial lanes,
And child-like masses, many tongued
Whose wages are in words and crumbs.

Like T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the city like a passion burns. "The city becomes hell and it is one of Ezekiel's achievements that without being quaintly lucid or straining for exotic effects, he represents it as the hopeless Indian hell." The poet feels corrupted by the city :

The jungle growth of what so obviously intends
To suck life from life, leaving you and me corrupted.

Being a veritable hell, the city cannot be saved :

I cannot save Bombay
You cannot save it.
They don't even
Want to save it.

In another poem "Healers" the poet refers to the death-wish of the city :

The unplanned city has a death-wish;
everybody is in the business, buying cures,
so the healers come in droves.

The vulgarities of this "large sprawling town" — its jazzy picnics, cooking on smoky stoves, shooting beggars and bargaining in cheap bazars — are depicted in the poem entitled "Portrait." Ezekiel knows that "the city of my birth and rebirth" ("Poem of the Separation") is crude and squalid, yet he becomes a part of it :

Unsuitable for song as well as sense the island flowers
into slums and skyscrapers, reflecting precisely
the growth of my mind. I am here to find my way in it.
(*Island*)

The poet cannot ignore the ugliness of the city but also knows that it is simply the other side of beauty. And in his poetic world both often appear together. It is this togetherness and his viewing of it that enable him to record poverty, corruption, crude innocence, hope as well as hopelessness of people caught between conflicting values. Despite all the negative aspects of the city, he cannot leave it :

I cannot leave the island,
I was born here and belong.

He knows that his creative imagination owes much to his urban environment. His poetic sensibility, vision and insight are shaped by the local habitation, so he intends to mind "the ways of the island/ as a good native should,/ taking calm and clamour in my stride."

Adil Jussawalla's poem "Sea Breeze, Bombay"⁸ focuses on the uniting power of the city. The poet visualizes Bombay as a heavenly place where the partitioned people of Sind got the chance of rooting themselves. Bombay, the commercial capital of the country, is the "surrogate city of banks,/ Brokering and bays, refugee's harbour and port,/ Gatherer of ends whose brick beginning work/ Loose like a skin, spotting the coast." The poet proclaims that communities go on tearing and re-forming themselves but the island lays a cover on all of them so that they can live together peacefully :

Still,

Communities tear and re-form; and still, a breeze,
Cooling our garrulous evenings, investigates nothing,
Ruffles no tempers, uncovers no roots,
And settles no one adrift of the mainland's histories.

Thus the qualities of incorporation and re-integration are seen as characteristics of the island city. One is tempted to remember what Dr. Khanna tells Arjun in Gur Charan Das's *A Fine Family* :

Bombay is the only real city in India.... Muslims, Parsees, Hindus and the British — all of them made it into what it is today. And now people from all over India come to make their fortunes here. We all have a 'native place', as we Bombaywallas say, and we all dream of returning to our homes in the heartland. But the city mesmerizes us and we never return.⁹

The other metropolitan city Calcutta appears in the poems of Pritish Nandi, Kamala Das, K. Mahadev, Margaret Chatterjee, P. Lal, and many others. Pritish Nandi's poem "In Summer, Calcutta Catches Fire"¹⁰ deals with the theme of mechanical lust and the suffering associated with it :

Your mechanical lust broke through my arrogance
 and the fire that had died
 within you ravaged my passionless loins
 In that single act of vengeance you taught me
 how not to love and in our
 mutual death I discovered what despair could mean.

In another poem "Calcutta If You Must Exile Me",¹¹ Nandi focuses on the ruthlessness prevalent in the city — headless corpses, murders without vengeance or hate, the wilful death of the women of Sonagachhi, the death of the armless leper who dies of hunger, the cages of Burra Bazar where obscene lust remains in the eyes of the wrinkles of the virgins. Yet he loves the city so much that he does not want to leave it. He requests the city that if it must exile him, it should wound his lips, burn his eyes and destroy his sanity before he goes. This suggests that despite different kinds of immoral and inhuman activities taking place in the city, it maintains its innocence as well as purity. Devinder Kohli rightly observes that Nandi evokes a landscape at once frenzied and explosive :

It focuses the intense hate that Calcutta arouses in one who also feels so rooted in the city that for him an exile would be tantamount to emotional death. 'Calcutta if you must exile me destroy my sanity before I go' is the anguished cry of one who is unable to reject a city he has come to hate, because he also loves it.¹²

Alongwith the love/hate relationship with Calcutta, Nandi also tries to bring to English-language poetry the social and political involvement which has been characteristic of some of the regional-language literatures.¹³

Kamala Das, who writes in Malayalam under the pen name of Madhavi Kutti, has converted to Islam and will write under the name of Suraiyya. She has written many poems dealing with the urban landscape. One of her volumes is entitled *Summer in Calcutta*.¹⁴ In her autobiography she observes :

Calcutta gifted me with beautiful sights which built for me the sad poems that I used to write in my diary in those days. It was at Calcutta that I saw for the first time

the eunuchs' dance. It was at Calcutta that I saw a prostitute, gaudily painted like a cheap bazar toy. It was at Calcutta that I saw the ox-carts moving along the Strand Road early in the morning with proud, heavy-turbaned men, their tattooed wives with fat babies dozing at their breasts like old drunkards in clubs at lonely hours.¹⁵

Many of these experiences were later transmuted into poetry. Thus the poem "Visitors to the City" is far removed from the disturbing portrait of Calcutta as represented by Pritish Nandi. The poem shows Das's response to the external world :

This morning on Strand Road, I watched them come
In carts that crept through winter-mist, ox-bells
Ringing, red dust rising,
Proud, heavy-turbaned men, and their wives with
Tattooed cheeks, silver on their arms and fat
Babies dozing at their
Breasts, like old drunkards in clubs at lonely
Hours. They did not once look at me, but,
I watched and I watched,
Until the last cart went round the bend and
Red dust settled on the road, and silence.

The sense of poise with which the outer landscape is depicted does not reflect the inner landscape of the poetess which is replete with restlessness. "If her moods colour the outer landscape, they colour it in much the same way as the virgin whiteness of the sun does : bringing out rather destroying the contours of the objective details."¹⁶

The title poem "Summer in Calcutta" derives its poetic meaning from the poet's intimacy with the pleasures of the Indian summer. The April sun brings sensuousness and warm intoxication. It becomes the "noble venom" that flows through the poet's veins providing a transient relief from despairs. In this mood she longs for the company of her lover :

Dear, forgive
This moment's lull in
Wanting you the blur
In memory. How

Brief the term of my
Devotion, how brief
Your reign when I with
Class in hand, drink, drink,
And drink again this
Juice of April suns.

As a contrast to the outer landscape in the earlier poem, the inner landscape of the poet's heart is given space in the poem.

Margaret Chatterjee's poem "Calcutta 1970"¹⁷ again presents a contrast with Kamala Das's poetic world. The poem deals with the destruction and merciless killing in the city — the village burnt but not quite razed to the ground, the soundless stabbing just outside the city which has no walls. The poetess adds a new dimension to the poem by showing her concern for the "labelled dead" because they were "husbands, fathers, brothers, sons."

Keki N. Daruwalla has created several city portraits in his poems, though he says, "I am not an urban writer and my poems are rooted in the rural landscape. My poetry is earthy, and I like to consciously keep it that way, shunning sophistication which, while adding gloss, takes away from the power of verse."¹⁸ He further says that the landscape "is not merely there to set the scene but to lead to an illumination. It should be the eye of the spiral.... For me a riot-stricken town is landscape."¹⁹ Thus in his poem "Curfew 2"²⁰, the riot is used as a landscape. No one should stir in the curfew. The roads should be clear. "Between the outrage without and pain / within there should be no discourse. Passion must be / held in the discarded geometry of lanes." This is so because

The stress is on silence. A man may die
but the body shouldn't thud. From the borken skylight,
light spills on the road like a patch of blood.
Sweat drips like a tap; self-loathing scours the room.
On the deserted terrace
a nightmare spins like a slow-motion simoon

The poem is a sarcastic comment on the insensitivity of the government officials who stress on the maintenance of outward

peace, whatever might be the inside story. Likewise, in another poem entitled "Paradise,"²¹ paradise is the Skylark Room in a five star hotel having all kinds of food and wines and blue films. The poet's viewpoint is depicted in the following lines :

'Would you like to see a blue film, Mr. Daruwalla?
It sure weakens you, the wora's debilitating!
I've got it home! "No, thanks Sardar Sahib,
Your talk alone is fairly titilating !"

Daruwalla's another volume, *Crossing of Rivers*,²² has several portraits of Benares, the oldest living city of the world. In "Boatride Along the Ganga" the poet is shocked to see the activities going on in the city. He is unable to decide whether he is in Paradise, purgatory or Hades :

Dante would have been confused here.
Where would he place this city
In paradise or purgatory or lower down
Where fires smoulder beyond the reach of pity?
The concept of the goddess baffles you —
Ganga as mother, daughter, bride.
What plane of destiny have I arrived at
Where corpse-fires and cooking-fires burn side by side?

The city of Lord Shiva, the greatest of the *aghoras*, still observes many rituals and customs which often shock a rational human being.

The city is known for its morning beauty (*Subaha-e-Benares*) but the activities going on, in the morning compel the poet to say :

There is a clang of cymbals
like brass beating against brass.
A conch-cry pierces the receding fog
like a shaft of light.
Gongs sound like hammered gold
and then a bald head
smeared with saffron
inching slowly above the distant reeds
dawns on the Ganga
like a bizarre illusion.

The bitter, sarcastic tone is obvious in phrases like "conch-cry," "shaft of light" and "bizarre illusion."

In another poem "Vignette III" the poet talks about the sepia teeth of the pandas in the street of Lord Vishwanath and the raucous laughter of whores in the street of virginity where dry sex is purchased like fuel. He does not find any difference between this city and any other city, especially at night. Benares becomes "a logarithm/ of other cities":²³

All cities are the same at night
When you walk barefoot
across their blistered backs.

A few examples which have been taken from some poems make it obvious that there is no easy reading of the city, no simple shuffling about of ironies as covers of situation. The cities have their own miseries — physical as well as mental. It is also noteworthy that the city functions as a market place especially in the poems of Nissim Ezekiel, Prithvi Nandi and Daruwalla. But at the same time, the ethology of the city life and the aesthetic as well as emotional ecology of the city visualize it as a place worth living because the urban experience is valorized and the perceptual chaos is converted into a richness and multi-dimensionality of consciousness. Thus the city has become a great textual tradition and in many of its powerful forms it has echoed out expectations of heaven and hell. It has become the central mental environment of Indian English poetry and is a presence, a foil, an entity too strong to resist.

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4

The Poetry of Kamala Das and Nissim Ezekiel — A Comparative Study

—M.A. Nare

LET ME at the out set say that in this brief critical paper I would like to examine and compare some aspects of the Poetry of Kamala Das and Nissim Ezekiel.

In 1980s, Indian Poetry in English established a new record of its achievements as the four poets : Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das and Shiv K. Kumar won the prestigious "Sahitya Akademi Awards" for their poetry.

This achievement was a terrible blow to the critics who had expressed their fears about the future of this genre in India.

Kamala Das and Nissim Ezekiel are great celebrities today on the Indian Literary Scene.

But Kamala Das in one of her interviews in Bombay said, "Bombay has made me a shabby celebrity. ...she further adds "In fact Bombay is not good for any one who is creative. Bombay culture will breed and sustain only those who flash their smiles and talk about extramarital affairs.... People destroyed me."

In my paper at the 39th All India English Teachers' Conference held at Madras (28-31 Dec. 1990) I have already shown how Nissim Ezekiel makes use of "Nakedness" in more than fifty poems now included in his *Collected Poems* — 1952-1988 (O.U.P.), 1989. These poems show his great obsession with sex which is more detestable than Kamala Das's.

Erotic scenes and sexual encounters are described in these poems without inhibitions as if, to entertain the readers as the cabaret dancers do at the clubs and Hotels in the great Metropolis — Bombay.

Prominent among these poems are Nudes (1 to 14), Nakedness I & II, Gallantry, At the Hotel, Marriage, Beach Scene, Night and Day, Love Poem, The Couple, Motives, Passion Poems (I, II & IV) Event, Description, Two Nights of Love, To a Certain Lady, The Female Image.

In the poem "Motives" the poet or his *persona* makes his motives clear to his mistress in the following lines :

"My motives are sexual,
Aesthetic and friendly,
In that order adding up
to bed with you."

(*Collected Poems*, p. 154)

The recurring images in these poems are : full breasts, round buttocks, large hips, round thighs, hair between the thighs, the belly naked shoulders, big eyes and lips, arms and legs, midribs moist, thighs unruly, singing breasts, threshing thighs.

Through these poems he shows lovers lost in sexual encounters — without a sense of guilt.

Let us see this Lady engrossed in her sexual encounter :

"I love undressing," she has to say,
as she undresses. The verbal and
Visual join in her.

"Is this a part of you? she asks,
as she holds it, stares at it.
Then she laughs." 'Put your finger
there' she pleads as if

I, need instructions. It's only
impatience, though, becoming frenzy
as I penetrate. 'Now' she claims
you are within me. Aren't you,
within me ? And she makes me say.

'I am.' (p. 246)²

Such intimate dialogues are designed to arouse erotic feelings and crude animal passions which gradually lead the lovers to a kind of frenzy in their sexual encounters.

His *persona* is a kind of modern Don Juan.

I personally feel, Ezekiel wants to entertain his readers through these pornographic word pictures.

Who would not like to see a video-film on such sexual encounters? But would our censor board permit such shows? Will the 'custodians of our culture in Bombay,' allow him to do this ?

Kamala Das also used sex in many of her poems but her love-scenes do not degenerate into such crude, sexual encounters, designed, perhaps, to arouse readers' base, animal-hungers.

From Kamala Das even if you take a poem like "The Freaks" or "The Looking Glass" and compare it with the one I have already shown from Nissim Ezekiel, you certainly feel that Kamala Das has skillfully maintained a very good balance between the aesthetic and the erotic elements in her poems. Kamala Das's motive seems to be different from Ezekiel's.

Art lies in concealing art.

And yet, Poor Kamala Das has been crucified by many Indian critics.

Unfortunately in those days, her autobiography *My Story* (June, 1976) added fuel to the fire already raging. *My Story* had created a great storm in the Indian Literary World. Some reviews described it as 'Erotica in Prose.' Some said, 'The book has its accent on titillation.' So, there was a move to ban the book — in India.

But, they had forgotten that Kamala Das is a confessional Poet, like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. And through her poems and her autobiography *My Story* she had expressed her deep rooted frustrations in her or her *persona's* married life. Also, being a feminist poet herself, she tried to distort the romantic image of a Husband or a male Lover.

Her articles in 'Femina', 'Eve's Weekly', 'Imprint', 'Intimate' and her columns in 'Blitz' and 'The Current Weekly' reveal her feminine sensibility and her missionary zeal to work as a feminist writer. Especially her articles like — "Why not more than one husband?"

(*Eve's Weekly* — May 6, 1972).

'Enough of Pativrata',

(*Blitz*, April 30, 1977)

and, 'Only those Above 55, Obsessed with sex',

(*Current Weekly*, Jan. 26, 1974)

created enough hostility and bitterness in the minds of the so-called custodians of Indian Culture.

But now, she has successfully passed through those ordeals. No Indian Woman Poet writing in English, could surpass her even to this day. She still shines brightly like the full Moon in the Indian Sky, surrounded only by a few minor, luminaries.

Dr. G.S. Amur, has described her achievements in 'The Year of the Poet' :

"Kamala Das, the new recipient (of the Sahitya Akademi Award), burst up on Indian Poetical Scene in 1965 with her first collection 'Summer In Calcutta' with a highly original and uninhibited voice shattering the image of the woman poet created by her distant predecessors like Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu and has never been unduly worried about the purely aesthetic concerns of form and style and has allowed them to be determined by an authentic search for personal identity which has taken her through a maze of familial and sexual-relationships.

She has often been compared with American Confessional poets like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton who must have been a source of inspiration to her but Kamala Das's daring in the context of the conventional society where she functions and in the absence of a puritanical tradition of confession has been even more impressive.

She has added a new dimension to Indian Poetry in

English and the Akademi Award is a fitting tribute to her achievements.”³

Let's examine her poem 'The Looking Glass' where she gives her advice to young married ladies or girls of marriageable age.

'The Looking Glass'

“Getting a man to love is easy,
Only be honest about your wants as
Woman, stand nude before the glass with him
So that he sees himself the stronger
And believes it so, and you so much more
Softer, younger, lovelier....
Admit your
Admiration. Notice the perfection of his
limbs, his eyes reddening under
The shower, the shy walks across
the bathroom floor,
Dropping towels, and the jerkey way he
Urines. All the fond details that make him
male and your only man.
Gift him all,
Gift him what makes you woman,
the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweat between
the breasts.
The warm shock of menstrual blood
and all your
Endless female hungers. Oh, yes,
Getting a man to love is easy but living
Without him afterwards may have to be
Faced. A living without life when you move
Around, meeting strangers, with your
eyes that
Gave up their search, with ears that
hear only
His last voice calling out your name
and your
Body which once under his touch
had gleamed
Like burnished brass, now drab and destitute.

This poem sounds like the columns she wrote in Bombay for young girls and married women.

But the 'Motive' in the poem certainly is not sexual to entertain her readers through erotic scenes, but to enlighten them on 'Man Woman Relationship' — a great job that D.H. Lawrence was doing through his Novels and stories.

I think Kamala Das was more influenced by D.H. Lawrence than Anne Sexton or Sylvia Plath. When she wrote such poems, she must be having Freudian theories on Sex, Love and Inhibitions at the back of her mind. Now, let us turn to some other aspects of their poetry and their views on composition of a poem.

In 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher' Ezekiel says, 'Best poets wait for words.' But Kamala Das has expressed her different view on words in a poem — 'Without Pause.'

Write without /
A pause, don't search for pretty words
Dilute the truth, but write in haste of
Everything perceived and known and loved.
(*Summer in Calcutta*, p. 150)

In 'Words' she writes :

All around me are words and words and words,
They grow on me like leaves, they never
Seem to stop their slow growing
From within.
They never stop their coming.
From a silence, somewhere deep within. (p. 11)⁴

This shows Kamala Das believes in spontaneous writing like D.H. Lawrence. She wants that poems must grow under one's pen.

While Ezekiel in a poem — 'Poetry' writes :

A poem is an episode, completed
In an hour or two but poetry
is something more. It is the why
the how, the what, the flow
From which a poem comes....

(*Collected Poems*, p. 13)

He also wrote an article "How a poem is written."

About his poems he writes — 'I aim at clarity above all.' I like to make controlled, meaningful statements, avoiding extremes of thought and expression.

The world of Kamala Das and her canvas are very small.

Like Jane Austen she has worked 'only on four inches of ivory' but she has shown a rare kind of skill in handling her themes. Through her poems she has revealed the predicament of a modern Indian Woman. Robert Lowell has rightly said to her, — 'Kamala all your poems are one poem.' I think like Elizabethan Sonnet Cycle she has written many lyrics with the same theme. But her every poem is a precious, unpolished diamond in the necklace. In many poems she has used surrealistic images.

Though Nissim Ezekiel's canvas is very large and he has handled various themes in his poetry he could not give us creative images like Kamala Das or Ramanujan.

Of his work Ezekiel writes, 'I have written in the traditional verse forms as well as free verse.... Some of my recent poems are in Indian English. Major themes : Love, personal-integration, the Indian Contemporary scene, modern urban life, spiritual values. I aim at clarity above all. I like to make controlled, meaningful statements avoiding extremes of thoughts and expressions.

Kamala Das, a devoted Indian wife, like a woman in her 'Sunshine Cat' felt suffocated and cut off from the outer world throughout her long frustrated married life.

She has revealed the deeper layers of her wounded psyche through many of her poems and her *My Story*.

What Carl Jung calls 'the collective unconscious' or 'the racial memory' plays a vital role in many of her poems.

The suppressed, endless feminine hungers of a Nair girl find an outlet through such poems. She shows her genuine struggle to dig out her roots like Sylvia Plath.

Ezekiel has revealed his roots in 'Background Casually.' He did not write his autobiography so far. He has given us 'Some very Indian poems in Indian English.' They are his dramatic monologues. His tone in these poems is ironical, satirical and humorous.

The 'Good bye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.' is his favourite, not the best poem, from this group. At 'All India English Teachers' Conferences he likes to read this poem and the audience is thrilled to hear it from him.

I think Ezekiel has tried to burn his sin-ridden Jewish psyche through many poems. He also had to struggle to overcome his problem of alienation which he has successfully done to a great extent, through his commitments.

In 'Sanskrit Poets' he says —
 How freely they mention
 breasts and buttocks.
 They are my poetic ancestors.
 Why am I so inhibited?

His commitment to accept India as his land is shown in the poem — 'Island.'

'I can not leave this land
 I was born here and belong.'

Kamala Das did not face any problem of alienation, save the problem of a modern intellectual woman facing a kind of isolation from the society in which she lives. K. Ayyappa Paniker has introduced her in the following words :

'Her formal education has not gone beyond the portals of a high school but she is perhaps the most widely known of all Indian women writers in English today. Her language has a freshness and vitality lacking in the writing of the 'over educated' compatriots of hers.

She is deeply concerned with personal experiences, but not un mindful of public affairs. The true voice of feeling : that is how one may describe her poetry.'⁶

Recently, Kamala Das has created another storm by courting Islam. She is no more Kamala or Madhvikutty — She is now — Suraiya.

What is there in a name ?

I respect her right to embrace any religion for it comes under personal freedom.

But I would be more happy if she gives us some more beautiful poems filtered through her dark Purdah — which she likes these days.

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5

Dispossessed Nests : The 1984 Poems

—R.P. Lokhande

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S *Dispossessed Nests* (1986) relates the socio-political crisis in the life of India. These poems are also sub-titled as 'The Poems of 1984.' The year 1984 is significant in the life of India for the Punjab Turmoil and the Bhopal Gas tragedy which predict the dark future of India. In *Dispossessed Nests*, the poems one after the other echo the suffering and disintegration of man in the light of these two events.

The title of the verse collection is significant. These two events made the living unbearable. The life set on knives, bomb-blast and gas was decaying everyday to its utmost level. The dispossession of life was continued and which in a way was the desertion of Nests. This human desertion is the major concern of the poems. Another noticeable thing — the poems are not titled. They have only numbers. The poems one after another mark the human destruction on various planes. Hence there is no need to title the poems separately. The poems are scenes depicting one major theme, *i.e.* human destruction.

The book, first, entitled 'Bewildered wheatfields' deals with Punjab Turmoil and the second entitled as 'A dance of Bejewelled snakes' is about Bhopal gas tragedy. The poems under these two titles do not suck their energy from the veins of real life but they explore the theoretical contexts of the Punjab and Bhopal gas tragedy. The idea of terrorism and how it has brought fear, violence, destruction and decay in the life of the common man in Punjab has been brought out intelligently. The 'Wheat' is the major crop of Punjab, but its fields are now

inhabited by dead bodies. This is the anguish of the poet. The commercial plants set for the purpose of the profit also impose tragedy in the life of common man and this is evidenced by the Bhopal gas tragedy which has brought the endless suffering in Bhopal. When this mishap occurred thousands were gasping for breath — small, young and old met the same fate — the death. This careless act of the Multinational company is more demonic than the *Tandava of Shiva*. Mahapatra also underlines the corrupt political world which is responsible for the tragedy of the people. The 'Political region' is also a concern of Mahapatra which has brought destruction in life. These are some ideas woven in the poems to predict the 'dark future' of India. Thus the dispossession and the sense of desertion reflects in every poem.

The themes like human destruction, violence, decay, politics, suffering and disintegration are dealt with in these poems. The human destruction can be analysed on all three levels, physical, cultural and moral. We find the destruction both on personal and impersonal level too. The destruction of man and the destruction of 'property.' This destruction leads towards dispossession and disintegration, the evils of the modern life and world. Politics is another factor to bring in the social destruction now-a-days. The journey of the politics from 'constructive' to 'destructive' is the anguish of Mahapatra. He depicts the ghastly attitudes of the political leaders. The causes of this destruction emerges as — 'the politicised religion' and 'commercialised politics', corrupt political leaders, commercial plants, lawlessness, hopeless economy of India etc. The themes in this verse collection are elaborated in the light of these aspects.

The result of this destruction leads to confirm that the man is alone in his suffering. He has lost his spiritual struggle to react against the callous forces of corrupt socio-economic set up. The endless suffering is the destiny of the people and so is also the master current in these poems.

The poems included under the title 'Bewildered Wheatfields' depict the theme of human destruction, violence, politics, and

bring to notice the 'terrorised Punjab'. The analysis of the poems is as follows :

In Punjab, the terrorists with their arms and ammunition killed so many innocent people. There the experience of the 'night of decaying bodies'. The shooting was endless and there was a pile of the dead bodies. The poet explains this social horror through the images of nature. He presents the frustration of a turbulent community as :

The dry riverbed
wrapped up in a shroud of moonlight

We find the poet helplessly surrendering to social horror when he sees the human suffering and killing. He smells this horror through natural elements and with anguished tone he says :

This night of the decaying bodies
of those whom I love

He brings the sense of human destruction and decay through the images of nature. The crisis in nature is reflected here. The riverbed is 'dry' and wrapped in 'shroud moonlight', the light of the stars 'ruined' one and with it the bodies are 'decaying'. The very images of the nature bring the sense of destruction and with it predict the dark future of community.

The people of Punjab who were very calm and not very serious about their lives are now experiencing the scenes of violence and destruction. The Wheatfields have lost their silence. The violence creeping in the life of Punjab is recorded as :

amidst bewildered wheatfields
the cool night wind snips of the skin

Why this 'killing drama' is 'on' in Punjab? Why this attempt to dry up the river of life and hear the 'sands breathe?' How long this hate will continue? Mahapatra's questioning tone hints at the suffering of humanity.

The everyday news bulletin on TV brings the news of the shot-dead people, in Punjab. The poet wishes something good on 'TV tonight'. But the report covers nothing but deaths of innocent people. The poet contemplates on this social violence

and asks when this wilderness will end. Mahapatra feels that it will get a full stop but everyday death confirms its continuity. Therefore the hope for 'something good' on the television tonight proves futile.

In Punjab, even the eyes of mask are imparting fear. 'The petticoat stirred' in the wind exposes the buried horror of the long and supreme knives. The dead bodies cast out are looking for the head. The pale moonlight is like a white cloth in the death's land. This brings to notice the madness of violence and heinous killings. The dance of violence and destruction is at its apex here. It seems that the land of Punjab is the land of debris.

The images from the world of violence like 'trembling of purple', 'the torso', 'a roll of smoke' and the images from the world of nature like pale moonlight, 'death's wild land' wind bring out the sense of violence of decay.

The world of nature is rendered in the context of the 'human destruction' as :

Sultry july
the grasses of the dead
are growing fast

The image of 'sultry july' indicates the 'hot atmosphere' and with it there is a hot atmosphere of 'dead bodies' too. The dead bodies multiply fast. The fear of death creeps in intensely as the terrorist activities increase.

The terrorist activities were started to bring in total disintegration in Punjab. Not only the social institution but the familial life was also crushed under the thumb of terrorists. Many times the family members meet the same fate — the death. Even the children. It shocks us when the chief of the family is killed and the small girl becomes the victim of the terrorist world. The poet expresses his anguish about it as :

When did she
get used to the world?
she
frightens us
recording the threat of violence.

Living as a human being on the land of Punjab seems to be a type of crime. Common people are worried to be alive. The humane attitudes of the land are replaced by beastly attitudes. To be human is the subject of hate. The qualities of 'humane' can be appreciated in dream only. The poet points out the social fear as :

To be human
is to see in a dream perhaps

There is refrain of hate about 'to be alive' in his mind. But when he sees the rainfall, he feels that the senseless refrain of hate will change into 'the amazement to be alive'. The poet's hope for the positive attitude of life is fully reflected here.

The poet narrates the episode of hijacking and brings out how hijacking is emerging as national addict of violence today. He explains the hijacking of Flight 405 to Lahore very ironically. The humane behaviour of the terrorist generates confidence in passengers. But at last, the evil in the terrorist gets hold of the passengers. The major cause behind the hijacking is 'Khalistan'. Like the well trained protesters the terrorist would shout 'Long Live Khalistan' and attack passengers with their bullets. All this is associated with social violence and criminality and results further in disintegration — geographical, social and cultural. The poet further points out the irony that the daughters of the victimised parents are eager to listen to the hijacking anecdotes from their mothers. The poet observes it as :

The vermilion on the woman's forehead
ripples in the dark. Her kid daughter wants
her favourite hijacking anecdote narrated again
to lull her to sleep

The fear of the terrorists enters in the 'world of children'.

It all indicates that the man is all alone to combat with the vices of socio-political set-up. The suffering of humanity due to terrorist activities is the subject of this poem. It also indicates how in the name of Khalistan the life of the common man in Punjab is put under the dark shadows of fear. The uproar of the terrorism and the meek acceptance of it by the common man is

unending. Terrorism adds to the sufferings of the common man, who is already fed up with his lot and role, in a country like India.

The land of Punjab accustomed to the 'Curfew', 'Ambulance', 'impatient darkness', 'doorbell', 'death' etc. These are the things one nourishes hatred for. The anguished tone of the poet is directed towards political and administrative set-up in Punjab. He records his observation as :

In the city of the round-the-clock
curfew, and the white trucks
painted AMBULANCE fighting
my thought in the sun

The deformed humanity is the concern of Mahapatra here.

The very existence of man is threatened by the endless bomb-blast. Life itself is a nest but it is totally shattered and the very possession is questioned. The current socio-political system is responsible for this scene. The agonies of dispossession continue. He observes it as :

This is the last explosion
we hope
and wait

How we wonder
in the mind's expanding nova
the dispossessed nests

The dominance of antisocial elements is responsible for the dispossession of man in Punjab. The series of bomb-blast leads to destruction and dispossession of man on social, moral and cultural level. Every explosion marks the dispossession and disintegration of men in the country. The psychological and material dispossession also figures in these poems.

The land of Punjab is the land of suffering humanity. The socio-political systems have brought this fate to the people. We find the administrative system careless about the suffering of widows whose husbands were shot-dead by terrorists. A lonely woman is standing in the queue for her sustenance allowance. This brings out the callousness of the Government that compels

widows in queue for sustenance allowance. Mahapatra records the anguish of a widow as :

the voice of the lonely woman
standing in the queue for her sustenance allowance
(her husband shot dead by terrorists last month) —
a voice which the roar
of the Minister's jet cuts short

It is the duty of the Government to support the people who become the victims of antisocial elements. In Punjab, the fate of widows is tragic one. They have to struggle for sustenance allowance by standing in the queue. This is more heart rending and wretched one. The poet points out that the agonised minds of widows are made more agonised by the political decisions. The evil nature of the administrative set-up and its callousness is recorded here.

How 'living' is unbearable for the old in Punjab finds expression in

And the old man whom I call father
slowly opens his mouth to swallow
the spoonfuls of glucose being fed to him
I have been watching him lie in his bed
for every two years now

The 'living' for old and widows is worthless. It seems that they are gasping for breath, they are on the brink of death. The picture of the old, disabled, supportless people affected by the horrors of terrorism rampant in Punjab then drawn by the poet well defines 'Punjab' of the time.

The families as well as the Government officials are the victims of Militants' acts. Disintegration of the land is the chief purpose of the terrorist. The process of disintegration is on both the levels — mental and material. The life is deshaped and is all the time under the threat of destruction. The poet brings out the reality about the land and says :

No dreams blow in the unlocked skull

The environ of dream is totally dark and is inhabited by the world of violence.

Then follows the violent scenario in Amritsar. The horror of supreme knives is the reality in the city. The shadows of violence follow the life in the land. He puts it as :

Only shadows
Pick up the reigns of reality in Amritsar
Shadows
of long and supreme knives

The poet makes an ironical comment on the political world. The leaders are more sensitive about past History which is lifeless but turn a deaf ear to the unrest and suffering of common man in Punjab. Their suffering turns out to be a pet topic for casual discussion-moods of the people and the administrators.

the calendar hatches India's history
a lifeless story
chewed on by the vultures of the country's leaders

It is ironic that the shadows of death are roaming on the land and the political leaders are more interested in chewing the India's past history. Their negligence about the people and reality is the concern of Mahapatra.

Silence pervades the poems in this collection. It is horrible, frightening. It nonpluses the readers. It seems that to express something eluding in the mind, Mahapatra uses the word 'silence'. The word 'silence' has different connotations. The violence in the land of Punjab creates 'silence' in the land. Here in 'silence' there is an indefinite expansion of fear and the threat imposed on life. The silence is the metaphor of suffering. He records his observation as :

For silence is the only evidence
left behind, strange solace
for mankind

Mahapatra comments on today's social mentality which has evilsome attitude towards a stray woman. The houses of such women become victims of male sexuality. The male force operates here as a rape and its apex is achieved through the murder of such a woman. The Indian culture and tradition which talks in high pitch about Indian woman is thus degenerated by

evilsome and beastly forces. The status of woman is thus degraded. The social anguish is recorded as :

Now a man knows only two ways
for dealing with stray woman :
he rapes her
and he kills her

The lawlessness in society and suffering of female is again a major concern of Mahapatra.

Mahapatra brings to notice the stark reality of the political world. The political leaders have lost their sensibility for social life. It has festered into the 'hard knots of meanness'. The image of leaders and their behaviour gets recorded as :

The tall dark mountains burying their faces
in the false snow to stifle their laughter

Further in the same poem the poet recalls the 'distant pinpoints of light' as mythic battles, angry gods and the heroism of Hanuman that constitute Indian culture. What have we achieved? In an ironic tone, the poet says that 'the false world of leaders' is what we have attained so far.

Mahapatra tries to see today's political leaders through the image of Mahatma Gandhi. Is it that what Gandhi had given to the country and politics is the fate of today's political leaders? Yes, Gandhi had given a lot of good for future generation. Formerly the issue was freedom and status of India. Now the self-centred nature of political leaders and how they have degenerated the trends of Gandhi's way is what we have at our disposal. With an elegiac tone, Mahapatra writes :

We had read so much about you, about freedom
Was everything you did
Gandhiji, only an act you put on for posterity?
with India, our India, barely worth raping?

The moral decay in politics is the concern of Mahapatra here.

Mahapatra also underlines the mute suffering of common man and his predicament in the country. Due to corrupt socio-economic set-up and the inability of common man to react against it, his condition like that of one floating in the sky of his

own suffering, completely lost in the state of mental inertia where you 'nurse the sickness of fear'. After the harsh experience of socio-economic set up the condition of the commoner is :

I know I have been in love with the world
a little too much, taken my own place
for granted and become the secret landscape

The common man loses the fire of a spiritual struggle and sadness deposits. This anguish is recorded as :

the pigeons of my town
must fly and perch on the unspoken sadness
of the bronze statue
decapitated once in sudden redness

A mad unrest is cropping up in the society against the corrupt political scene. The unrest of the people is directed towards 'Delhi'. The 'deep sigh' of the revengeful mouth is going to shake politicians' dust of Delhi. The poet feels that now it is time to check the evil shades that are challenging the common man's identity — and this will be achieved by breaking the moral restraints of country's adolescence. The poet points out that the helpless social life is in the hands of politicians. The anguish regarding it finds expression :

For this is the hour of the deep sigh
that shakes the politicians' dust of Delhi

The poet contemplates the past and labels it as a 'bastard past'. Today's evil tendencies are the 'pack' of our past. The sense of guilt occupies his mind. He underlines it as :

...rapist behaviour in our prehistoric pack

For political parties 'unity' is more important than the 'good' of their country. This dimension of politics is not new to the social life. They come to power to do good for the people, but :

How false they seem, even to themselves

The satiric comment is to bring out the hollowness and the futility of political world and its future.

The mute suffering of humanity and its utter helplessness against the social evils bring to our notice the fragmented social set-up of the country. The very domestic life is threatened by the administrative and terrorist forces. This is the land of debris. The poet gives expression to it as follows :

The huge siren hangs over acres of empty streets
where a child looks across it dead mother
into his face, its all-white emptiness echoing

The king would fight in the past time, to expand the boundaries of state and Dharma. But today, the concept of Dharma is diseased one, totally oriented to self-interest of community or group. Mahapatra labels the 'politicised religion' of today as :

an enormous
pathological
dream of Dharma

The 'politicised religion' is the 'Dharma' in Punjab and has brought the evil fate of the people.

The major concern of Mahapatra in the first section of this verse collection is the Punjab Turmoil. The themes of suffering, decay, destruction, violence develop in the light of Terrorism and politics here. This collection is an insightful comment on the indisciplined, dis-integrated, distorted picture of the country.

'A dance of Bejewelled snakes' deals with human suffering brought by commercial plants and politics. Human destruction is the major theme here. The Bhopal gas-tragedy is a major event in the recent history of India. Mahapatra mentions some lines of *Pablo Neruda* to underline the tragedy of humanity to realise the huge suffering around. The analysis of the poems is as follows :

The Bhopal gas-tragedy took place on 3rd December, 1984. The cover photograph of 'India Today' of 31st December, 1984 of Gas victimised people inspired the poet. The cover photograph was of a small girl Leela, aged five, daughter of Dayaram of Chola Kenchi, Bhopal, who died of gas poisoning. This was victim number 569. This offers Mahapatra a straight-forward

probe into the mind of Leela's father. While recording the reaction of the father, he says, it was hard for Dayaram to realise the death of his daughter by the poisonous gas. The condition of Dayaram — a father — is recorded as :

...his half-walking mind
trying fruitlessly to drain the sea of his reality

The poet uses the image of fish to bring out the tragic condition of man. Just like the fish caught in the net the people were trapped by the gas. And thus their gracefully rising was snapped. Leela wouldn't have dreamed herself? The poet dreamt of Leela's eyes filled with pains like 'sails filling the wind'. The world of innocence was thus confronted with the world experience. The agonies of a father and daughter recorded here has a reaction of social reality. These are the representative agonies.

The poem records the heart rending suffering, the helpless surrender of man to reality.

The commercial plant is one of the evils to bring in human destruction and tragedy. But the poet when he sees around he finds the very social set-up and the anti-social elements have cast their evil shadows on the mass. He lists it as — 'feudal landlord', 'bejewelled snakes', 'iron bars' etc. These elements are directed to bring suffering and destructions of man and nation. Everyday the social, moral and cultural decay is on the increase. Directly or indirectly the social life becomes the victim of 'bejewelled snakes' and suffers a lot. Here the sense of social evil is brought in the form of natural elements like wind and rainwater.

Strange is the place to which you never belong
But somewhere among the crowd you are there
Young men stand in the crossroads, suddenly taller
without fear

The poet meditates on the conditions of man shaped by the current socio-political set-up. After independence what sort of life the people of India have achieved? The very socio-political, religious, moral and cultural decay of nation makes the poet contemplate on 'to find out where our lives have brought us'.

The poet is very much ashamed of the country's 'present' and the miserable condition of man. He says the present 'will not enable us to live in'. The diseased life force and the suffering through it is the vital concern of Mahapatra.

The poet is very much critical about the country's future being shaped by politics. His comments on the politics of the country are ironical. The poems, one after another mark the degenerated aspects of politics. He is very much serious about the values in politics but these values are being devalued in the present set-up. Politics is the 'feel' of society but it has lost this graceful side and indulged in dark activities. The poet records one aspect of this politics.

...the sinister shadow
of the minister with the dark power of his government
in the merciful sun.

Such is the politics centered around the self-interest. In the very daylight, the politics is operating its evil tendencies. The moral decay of politics is underlined here. The young are excited to shape this political world. Today, the corrupt politics is the evil fruit of society and in such circumstances we have to hope for the well-being of people and the country. Here the ministers are not for well-being of the people. The very human dignity and morality are darkened by the political considerations. Today's political scene is a type of ordeal for the future generations.

The anti-social elements and politics are sucking the marrow of life. In this sense the leaves of the dark tree of India are gasping for 'breath'. Everyday this darkness is depositing and the attempt is to be 'alive'. The sense of isolation is the product of the present political atmosphere. The life-style has lost vitality and vigour. People desire for the revival in social and political world and expect well-being from administration. The poet realises this in the "hum of silent, shut-in machinery". The poems develop the theme of decay-social, moral and even cultural.

Through the socio-political set up the poet probes into the collective unconscious of India. He records the violence,

destruction and decay. His mind makes a search through the images of nature in the world of violence. The hatred for man and his victimization is a common feature of politics today.

The darkness has lived long enough
for its nights to overcome its victims

He underlines the social darkness and with it the theme of violence and decay.

In poem 33, the poet handles the social issue of abortion. The illegal untimely pregnancy has become a custom in society today. The world of medicine has made it common. A lady viz. Yashoda, from a poor family is arranging for the second abortion of her fourteen-year daughter. The poet asks her 'why do you need a family Yeshoda'? This element of immorality has eclipsed the social life. Yeshoda is the representative of all such women who accept the abortion as a common thing. The very purpose of living and the value of domestic life is challenged here. The theme of moral decay is well developed here.

The curfew in social life imposed by anti-social elements, the moral and social crisis, violence and politics are the causes of human suffering. The various turns in politics and how it is harmful to social life is the concern of Mahapatra. The poems about politics brings out the corrupt social aspects in the most vivid way here.

The betrayal of political leaders, threat of multi-national companies and terrorism have darkened the social life and the common man is alone in his suffering. This realisation is sharpened in *Dispossessed Nests*.

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6

Ghasiram Kotwal : A Tragedy of Power

—Basavaraj Naikar

VIJAY TENDULKAR happens to be one of the most prolific Indian playwrights who has enriched the Indian drama and theatre by picturizing the varied problems of native life in Maharashtra. The main reason for our attraction for him is that he does not copy from or imitate the Western dramatists and thrust it on the native audience. On the other hand, he takes up typically Indian, especially Hindu problems which are deeply rooted in the Indian culture — which includes music, theatre, religion and philosophy. *Ghasiram Kotwal* is not an exception to this general truth about Tendulkar.

The native significance of *Ghasiram Kotwal* begins with the title itself. The story of the eponymous hero belongs to the history of Peshwas and hence has the authenticity of nativity about it. The characters of Nanasaheb Fadanvis, Ghasiram, Gouri and their situations are all historical. But Tendulkar has tried to make the play not a piece of antique history, but a reflection of ever operative mystery of life.

The play dramatizes the conflict between Ghasiram Kotwal, the eponymous hero and Nanasaheb Fadanvis, the Chief Ministers of the Peshwa of Pune in the nineteenth century. The play may be described as a tragedy of power as there is a conflict between power and powerlessness behind the manifestation of historical characters and events. As Samik Bandyopadhyaya rightly says, "Tendulkar, in his social criticism, is more

concerned with the mechanism of power, operating within society than with the economic and political implications and sources of that power." (*Introduction*, p. VI). Ghasiram, a brahmin of Kanauj comes to Pune for making his fortune, but he suffers from an unexpected humiliation at Pune when he is wrongly accused of thievery and therefore, arrested and imprisoned. Nobody listens to his honest explanation and clarification. Ghasiram is deeply worried about the loss of his reputation, "But I didn't steal. I swear to God I didn't. I'm not a thief. I'm from Kanauj. I'm a Brahmin. I've been here two weeks. I came here to find my fortune — and lost my reputation. How did it happen? What will happen to my wife ? to my daughter? What will they say when they hear of this?" (p. 16). He is imprisoned for a few days and released later with a warning to go away from Pune. The soldiers order him, "Get lost. Hey! thief, monkey. If you so much as put a foot in the holy city of Pune, you'll lose your head. Go away. Take your ugly face and go far away. Don't come back to Pune. Not ever your shadow should fall on the city of Pune. Get lost. Go" (p. 17).

The utter humiliation suffered by Ghasiram awakens in him the powerful emotion of revenge. He, therefore, takes a firm decision to stay in Pune and pay the people of Pune in their own coin, "But I'll come back. I'll come back to Pune. I'll show my strength. It will cost you! Your good days are gone! I am a Kanauj Brahmin, but I've become a Shudra, a criminal, a useless animal. There is no one to stop me now, to mock me, to make me bend, to cheat me. Now I am a devil. You've made me an animal, I'll be a devil inside. I'll come back like a boar and I'll stay as a devil. I'll make pigs of all of you. I'll make this Pune a kingdom of pigs. Then I'll be Ghasiram again, the son of Savaldas once more" (p. 17). Thus motivated by powerful vindictive desire, Ghasiram thinks of ways and means of achieving his goal without bothering about any moral principles. In other words, far from being an idealist, he becomes an opportunist and exploits the situation to the best possible advantage.

Ghasiram knows that Nanasaheb, the Chief Minister of the Peshwa King has a notorious weakness for women. Ghasiram who has a beautiful daughter called Lalita Gauri, wants to use her as a bait to attract Nanasaheb and get some power. In this hurry to achieve his goal, he never thinks of the consequences of his action. It is this indiscriminate opportunism which may be said to be the tragic flaw of Ghasiram. When a Haridasa is singing a religious song called *abhang*, Nanasaheb sits silently ogling at the beautiful women in the audience. When the Haridasa changes from *abhang* to *lavani*, the mood also changes from the religious to the erotic. Ghasiram's daughter has caught the fancy of Nanasaheb. Ghasiram is in the guise of a servant watching the reactions of Nanasaheb. A womanizer as Nana is, he accosts the sixteen year young girl Gauri when she is bowing down to the idol of Ganapati. He pats her shoulder. But the innocent Gauri is shocked and embarrassed by his behaviour and tells him that Lord Ganapati is watching his pranks. But Nana talks indifferently about the religious figure, "That idol of holiness? That all holy Ganapati? The Maker of Good? Look he has two wives. One on this side, one on that side. If you sit on our lap, he won't say anything about that!" (p. 19). When it becomes clear to Gauri that Nana is making advances on her, she tries to dissuade him from the erotic venture by calling him equivalent to a father. But Nana being utterly shameless, continues his erotic argument, "Only by age. But our devotion is — only to this graceful image.... Don't lose any more time. Youth will not come again; the bloom will not last. (He comes close and tries to put an arm around her.) My dear, you are like a daughter to us — someone else's" (p. 19). When Nanasaheb continues his erotic persuasion, Gauri feels scared and runs away from him like a frightened deer and escapes from there. Ghasiram has stood guard there in the guise of a servant. Nana, who is erotically frustrated by the escape of the girl, grabs the servant in his blind lust. The servant alerts Nanasaheb by saying that the girl has escaped and that the latter has grabbed a man-servant. Nana feels utterly frustrated and exasperated. He even wants to get the servant killed. But Ghasiram replies that there

is no other servant there to oblige him. On understanding the intensity of Nana's desire for a woman, Ghasiram exercises his opportunistic will to satisfy Nana's need and consequently get a great reward for it. He commits the tragic crime of sacrificing his own daughter's virginity for attaining some kind of deputational power from Nana. He wants to exploit Nana's sexual weakness to his advantage. He, therefore, promises Nana that "If the hunter is ready, the prey will be found" (p. 19) and that "Whoever she is, if the order is given, this servant will bring her" (p. 20). It is a matter of prestige for Nana to possess the girl of his choice. Otherwise he will lose his grandeur and his power becomes simply meaningless. He says, "If she is not found, no one will keep his head! Our grandeur's gone if she's not had. We tell you, if she is found, then this Nine Court Nana will conquer Hindustan! What a bosom! Buds just blossoming.... We'll squeeze them like this" (p. 20). Thus Nana wants to buy sex through his political (and social) power as a Minister. Ghasiram has a sex-object *i.e.* his daughter through which he wants to attain some kind of power. Accordingly he brings his daughter and offers her to Nana. Nana dances with her sensuously and gets himself amorously entangled with her. Ghasiram watches it from a little distance and feels happy to note that he has succeeded in trapping Nana through sex. Though Ghasiram feels guilty of misusing his daughter, he compromises with his conscience as he is goaded by the powerful emotion of revenge, against the people of Pune. He says, "Now he's in my hands.... Oh my daughter.... The beast.... (Then yells at the audience.) Oh you people, Look! I've given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf! Look. Look at this father. Putting his heart's child up for sale. Look at my innocent daughter — a whore. That old overripe bastard! Look at him, eating her like a peach..... Spit on me. Shove me. Look, look. But I will not quit. I'll make this Pune a kingdom of pigs" (p. 22).

Having trapped Nana sexually, Ghasiram wants to have a proper reward for his submission of a daughter. He wants to whet Nana's sexual appetite by refusing to send her on the

pretext of getting her married off. Nana feels momentarily frustrated and wants to offer anything demanded by Ghasiram. Ghasiram wants to put an end to all the wagging tongues in Pune. He, therefore, asks him, "All right Sir, to shut people's mouths, make me the Kotwal of Pune" (p. 24). Nana feels disconcerted by Ghasiram's suggestion and grows helpless.

Nana : No! Send her. I'll make you the Kotwal. When will you send her?

Ghasiram : After I have the order, signed and sealed, in my hand!

Nana : Bastard, You've got me in a narrow pass.

Ghasiram : Yes, the narrow pass of my only daughter (p. 24).

Nana yields to Ghasiram's terms and gives him a signed order of appointment as Kotwal of Pune. Ghasiram feels that he has succeeded in his clever plan, but like a tragic hero, he does not foresee the future trap into which he is entering. Nana has double advantages in appointing Ghasiram as Kotwal : one, sexual; and two, political. He can enjoy his daughter as well as use him as a thorn to remove the thorns or control the brahmins of Pune. Though Ghasiram thinks himself to be very smart, he fails to understand that Nana can be far smarter than him. Nana explains his inner motive as follows : "Go, Ghasya, old bastard. We made you. We made you Kotwal. Raise hell if you wish. But you don't know the ways of this Nana. This time, there are two bullets in this gun. With the first one, we'll fell your luscious daughter. But with the second we will make the city of Pune dance. Ghasya, child, you're a foreigner. I have put you on Pune's back. Why? As a countercheck to all those conspirators. You'll not be able to join them; they'll never trust you even if you do. Because you're a stranger, you're an outsider. We just raised a dog at our door to the Kotwali. We are your sole support. Oh, you're a bastard, Ghasya. Your manner will be more arrogant than that of Chitpavan Brahmins. You'll manage the deference nicely. You'll create a court — and a half! No worry about that. What'll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited

to your account. We do; our Kotwal pays. (He claps his hands.) The opportunity comes in the shape of Ghasiram. And that luscious peach is at hand to be bitten by Nana. Excellent! Yes, Ghasya, be Kotwal. This Nana blesses you" (p. 25).

Like a typical tragic hero, Ghasiram suffers from short-sightedness and fails to look at the truth from a larger perspective. Having bought power through sex, he grows intoxicated with it thereby metaphorically blinding himself further. He grows arrogant and high-handed and tries to impose very strict, but sometimes, very absurd rules according to which no whoring, cremation or intercaste dining can be done without a permit. The men and women have to stay at home at night and are not supposed to have extra-marital relationships. As a result of the strict imposition of his rules, "Prostitutes' Lane was desolate. / The chasing of women was halted. / Pimps turned into beggars. / Counterfeit coins were worthless" (p. 27). His imposition of rules on the behaviour of the people reaches the height of absurdity. He imprisons an innocent man returning home at night on the suspicion that he is going to a whore. Similarly he orders that "If anyone is seen throwing power at anyone but his wife, bind his hands. Morality must be protected. Take away the brahmins who are having too good a time..." (p. 31). When Ghasiram suspects even a real permit to be a counterfeit one, a woman goes straight to Nana and complains, "My husband and his brother have been arrested by the Kotwal's soldiers. My father-in-law died. They won't let them hold the funeral. The permit is real, but they call it counterfeit. Sir — the corpse has been lying in the cremation ground since morning. The dogs are gathering. Sir — please — give us justice..." (p. 32). But Nana is too busy with his fun with girls to care for the woman's complaint. Similarly Ghasiram arrests a brahmin priest simply because he is called a thief by another brahmin priest. Ghasiram's order to test the brahmin priest by putting hot iron balls on his palms is indicative of his callousness, high-handedness and sadism. When the brahmin priest is scared of the burning iron balls being placed on his palms for the second time,

he wriggles out of the situation by falsely confessing his crime of thieving. Thus Ghasiram's inhuman approach is very disconcerting to the citizens of Pune. The brahmin priest, therefore, curses Ghasiram, "I did not steal, I did not steal, I did not steal, O Ghasiram. You have tormented a poor innocent brahmin. You'll die without children! You yourself will endure torment greater than mine. You'll die a dog's death, grinding your heels in the dirt" (p. 36). Ghasiram has been digging his own grave inch by inch by following the path of heartless callousness and vindictiveness like a tragic hero. The moral law that he has been violating will one day assert itself and crush him properly. His crimes which border on sins will be balanced by a retribution. The brahmin's curse gives expression to that law of sin and retribution at the right time in future.

After partially fulfilling his vindictive impulse through power, Ghasiram dreams of finding a good bridegroom for his daughter and celebrate her wedding with great pomp and ostentation. One can see how pregnant his dream is with power. "I've got the Kotwali and I've Pune straightened out! All these hard, proud brahmins are soft as cotton now. No one dares to look at Ghasiram straight in the eye! Now once I find a fitting husband for my darling daughter — that piece of my heart named Lalita Gauri — and get her married, then everything will be the way I want it. I'll make such a show of the wedding that no one's tongue will move to utter one bad word about my daughter. And if some tongue starts wagging, it's easy to cut it off! Now-first-I'll look for a bridegroom. It's easy to find a bridegroom when one has money, jewels, and respect! And my daughter's beautiful — one in a million! I'll send my men right out to look for a husband and I'll arrange everything" (p. 37).

Meanwhile, Nana marries the seventh bride even at his advanced age. Ghasiram is surprised to learn that his daughter is not seen for quite a few days. He threatens Nana and asks him for his daughter. But Nana replies that Gauri has been sent to Chandra, the midwife in Kasba Peth. When Ghasiram enquires Chandra, she replies that Gauri is buried and that she was

pregnant before marriage. Terribly exasperated by the news of his daughter's unexpected death, Ghasiram kills Chandra, the midwife instantly by throttling her. In his terrific anger, he goes straight to Nana and asks him about his daughter, without bowing to him. Nana reminds him of the protocol to be followed in the presence of power. "Ghasya, how much more will you grieve? Now be calm. Whatever happened, protocol should not be forgotten. Don't you forget that. Whom do you stand before? First you must bow. Now — bow... That's right. Good. We acknowledge your loyalty. By our favour, you have become Kotwal. We are pleased with that" (p. 44). Ghasiram helplessly follows the protocol by bowing to Nana and continues his query about his daughter. But Nana replies to him in very philosophical terms about the temporality and illusionary nature of this life : "It is a misapprehension to think that she was here. It was illusion. The body will burn. It is misapprehension to think that she is no longer here. Death is without meaning, Ghasya. Life too is without meaning. No one belongs to anyone. No one is anyone's daughter. No one is anyone's father. In the end, only oneself belongs to oneself. Life is a dance of four days' charm. One must do one's duty. That's enough. I am the Chief Minister. You are the Kotwal. These are our duties. So go, go to your duty..." (p. 45). Although Nana tries to deceive Ghasiram with his Vedantic philosophy, Ghasiram is not convinced by the answer. But it can easily be understood within the context of the play that he has paid a price greater than his crime deserved. By surrendering his daughter to Nana for the attainment of power, Ghasiram has violated the moral law as well as his paternal duty. Now his daughter has died on account of her premarital pregnancy as well as the possible abortion forced upon her. The very power with which he wanted to enhance the happiness of his daughter has made him impotent. No only that. As he has violated the holy institution of marriage by surrendering the unmarried daughter to an old man, he has to face the unforeseen consequences of his action. Moral law in the form of Nature has taken away the life of his beloved daughter and given him a foretaste of retribution. But far from becoming wiser and

mellower, Ghasiram grows more and more vindictive in his actions. He has traversed the tragic path so far that he can no longer retrace it. He has to plunge further into the path of doom. Ghasiram easily brings to our mind Macheth who continues to follow the wrong path even after losing Lady Macbeth. He was so much intoxicated with his power and ambition that he could not leave in the middle of the course. In a like manner, Ghasiram, far from resigning from the post of Kotwali, continues in the same position to take further revenge upon the citizens of Pune. The climax of his high-handed behaviour may be seen in his treatment of south-Indian brahmins who come to Pune to seek their fortune and enjoy the munificence of the Peshwa. When they pluck some fruits in the garden belonging to Ghasiram, without knowing anything about him, he orders them to be arrested and imprisoned in a small unventilated cell without showing an iota of pity or understanding. As a result of suffocation in the dungeon some twenty-two brahmins die and some start dying. When the news circulates in the city, Sardar Phakade, the enemy of Ghasiram breaks open the doors of the cell and brings out the dead and the dying brahmins. Now Ghasiram has to bear the burden of the crime of having murdered twenty-two brahmins. The law of retribution starts working through the angry brahmins of Pune who in thousands rush into Nana's chamber and demand justice. Nana has no patience to go into the details of the crime, although he senses the enormity of it all. They demand that Ghasiram should be beheaded. Nana has no choice at all. He, therefore, takes up the pen and paper and writes out the order for beheading Ghasiram. Nana has acted according to his Machiavellian or Chanakyan philosophy. He says, "Use a thorn to take out a thorn. That's great. The disease has been stopped. Anyway, there was no use for him any more" (p. 52). Unaware of all these happenings, Ghasiram goes to the cell to show them what justice is. But ironically, he himself is surrounded by angry brahmins and beaten severely. Like a tragic hero, Ghasiram has a belated realization of his sin and repentance. He is now reconciled to his lot, "Ghasiram Savardas, Ghasiram Savardas! I danced on your

chests but I wasted the life of my little daughter. I should be punished for the death of my daughter. Beat me. Beat me. Hit me" (p. 54). Ghasiram's awareness of his sin is awakened and he is reconciled to his punishment as there is no escape from it. He, like a tragic hero, realizes the irreversibility of his action and the unavoidability of the consequences of his action. Finally he is murdered by the angry brahmins. The retribution meted out to Ghasiram proves the formula that he who negates the moral order of the universe gets negated by it ultimately. It is this law of retribution which is expressed in the callous words of Nana, "Ladies and gentlemen. Citizens of Pune. A threat to the great city of Pune has been ended today. (The crowd cheers.) A disease has been controlled. The demon Ghasya Kotwal, who plagued all of us, has met his death. Everything has happened according to the wishes of the gods. We have commanded that there be festivities for three days to mark this happy occasion" (p. 55). Finally the demand for moral justice is fulfilled and the circle of action and reaction is complete. Ghasiram richly deserves our pity for the punishment greater than he deserved. There is a tragic sense of waste illustrated through the death of Ghasiram. Vijay Tendulkar has presented a very striking picture of a tragic figure like Ghasiram.

The history of the performances of the play in Maharashtra shows that it was banned by the Progressive Dramatic Association of Pune on one of the grounds that the character of Nana Phadanvis as presented by the playwright was not historically correct. Such an objection to the play is based upon a lack of knowledge of the difference between art and life or reality. All art involves the principles of reduction or enlargement; understatement or exaggeration to some extent. Especially in a romantic tragedy, which the play incidentally is, the facts of life or history are bloated to some extent to drive home the higher truth of life. In this play, Nana's callous behaviour is exaggerated to match Ghasiram's callousness and vindictiveness in terms of art. It is, in a way, necessary to show how evil destroys itself out of its own abundance. In other words,

a lesser evil has to be defeated by a greater evil as vouchsafed by Hegel, the German aesthetician and philosopher.

It is a strange but happy fact that Vijay Tendulkar has produced a good romantic tragedy in *Ghasiram Kotwal* in spite of the fact that the traditional Indian literary theory does not assign a separate position to tragedy as a form of literature. The tragic vision ingrained in *Ghasiram Kotwal* easily provides a parallel to Shakespeare's tragic vision. Although tragic vision is part of the dynamics of the play, it has been expressed through the mechanics of dramaturgy indigenous to Hindu culture. The role of Sutradhara coordinating the action of the play, sometimes as a commentator and sometimes as a participant; the human wall or curtain of characters occasionally participating in the action of the play and withdrawing themselves; the choric singing and commentary; miming and dancing; the transformation of *abhang* into *lavani* and such other theatrical devices provide a rich Indian, Sanskrit and Marathi folk-element to the play thereby making it a very enjoyable artistic experience.

NOTE

All the page references are to the play, *Ghasiram Kotwal* by Vijay Tendulkar, English translation by Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1984.

7

Problems of the Indian Novelist in English

—*Vibha Mishra*

TODAY THERE are many Indian novelists writing in English; actually, they make up a formidable number. Besides Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, the three foremost Indian writers of fiction in English, we have, to mention only a few, K. Nagarajan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh, Balachandra Rajan and Kamala Markandaya. Their contributions have enriched Indian literary effort in English to a great extent. However, the problems they face are not merely those that every novelist in every language faces; there are in addition certain particular problems peculiar to the situation in which they find themselves as Indians writing in English. I may, therefore, consider here the questions whether the Indian novelist in English has successfully adapted the English language to deal with Indian themes and project an Indian image and how well he reflects essential Indianness in his novels.

There is as Bhabani Bhattacharya points out 'a kind of emotional allergy' to Indian writing in English.¹ This has already developed into what R.K. Narayan calls 'English-baiting' in his address to the seminar organized by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations on February 7, 1966. He remarks : "English-baiting is a fashionable pastime here and whoever wants to fling a stone, it is on the English language and the writer. The irony of it is he uses the same language."² Narayan's observation, coming as it did in the wake of the presidential address delivered by Sachchidananda Vatsyayan, a leading Hindi writer, to the fifth

All India Writers' Conference, was perhaps intended as a rejoinder. Vatsyayan — incidentally his address was in English — condemned the use of the English language for creative expression and went on to point out : "...India cannot have a literature — I mean a great literature, one in which her spirit will find expression — except in an Indian language. To me...to be Indian as a writer is first and foremost to write Indian, to write in an Indian language."³ Vatsyayan's condemnation of Indian writers in English is very much akin to an attack reported by R.K. Narayan to have been made by a Kannada writer. Narayan reports :

A Kannada writer once assailed me, 'You are a drohi.' 'Why?' I asked. He replied, 'You are writing for a public thousands of miles away giving no thought to our own peasant. Is it not your duty to enlighten him?' 'I do not think so. However, may I ask, since you write the language intelligible to the peasant, how many of your books are to be found in the peasant homes?' He left me abruptly, perhaps feeling that I was an impossibly argumentative drohi.⁴

The Kannada writer's attitude as also Vatsyayan's is typical of the attitude of creative writers in the regional languages towards Indian writers in English. According to them and a large number of enlightened Indians the writer in India ought not to write in English because, they say, it is a foreign language; to write in English is a kind of disservice to the nation and is quite incompatible with our national pride.

Besides these critics and creative writers whose anger with Indian writing in English derives partly from a misguided sense of patriotism and partly from a notion that the Indian writer must be a 'committed' artist, there are others who take an apparently scientific stand and argue that only through an Indian language can an Indian consciousness be expressed and that the attempt of the Indian novelist in English to depict the life of those whose emotional and intellectual life is fashioned by a different language is characterized by a total absence of the mutual nourishment between the writer and his society. They also point

out that since he writes for a western audience he will inevitably fail to present a true image of India in as much as in his own interest he will try to create an image that is most saleable.⁵

The first question, therefore, is about the suitability and adaptability of English as a medium for the Indian novelist. It is a question involving the fundamental right of the creative artist to express himself through whatever language he likes. As Bhabani Bhattacharya says :

...the Indian writer must be free to use any language he likes unharassed by criticism, either tacitly implied or plainly stated, and by any kind of compulsion, direct or indirect, which may come out of the strengthening mood of linguistic chauvinism.... The concept of freedom will have to include the medium of expression to which the writer, out of his inner urge, commits himself.... It is far more difficult to write creatively in a foreign language than in one's own. But that must be regarded as the writer's own business.⁶

English is a language which has deep roots in India and has for over a century remained the language of the intelligentsia. And all these years we have had a large number of creative writers in English. The earliest Indian novelist who consciously strove to adapt English to suit his purpose was Mulk Raj Anand. An examination of his style reveals the possibility of this adaptability though we notice certain drawbacks in his attempt. These drawbacks may be directly attributed to his practice of translating verbatim "all the dialogue in my novels from my mother-tongue and (thinking) out the narrative mostly the same way."⁷ One of the striking features of his style is that he translates into English such Punjabi swear-words and phrases as 'rape mother', 'rape daughter', 'the illegally begotten', 'where have you died' and 'eaters of monsters' that form part of the conversation of ordinary villagers. These words and expressions as they occur frequently in the dialogues in Anand's novels take away their sharpness, but nevertheless are not in themselves conducive to the realistic effect the novelist aims at. But a much more effective device he employs towards this end is seen in his

translation of Indian proverbs and similes. The following is an example :

Gangu recalled the proverb so often repeated in the North : 'Never believe a barber or a brahmin, for the one arranges marriages, and has to describe an ugly girl as a fairy, and the other draws horoscopes, and must make the evil stars appear the luckiest.'⁸

The curses, imprecations and abuse which Anand's characters use in their conversation are intended to achieve the purpose of giving the reader a taste of the Punjabi villager's ordinary conversation.

'O baby, you have eaten my life! You can't rest even while I am talking business to anyone! May you die! May your liver burn! May you fade away! You of the evil star! Now what is the matter with you! What do you want? You....'⁹

But where Anand fails in his effort to evolve an Indian English or to attain an Indian atmosphere is in his vulgarisation of English words like 'engine' into 'injan' 'fashion' into 'fashun' and 'motor car' into 'motu car'. Again, the use of uncommon words like 'vagabondizing' or coinages like 'gooder' or literal translation of vernacular idioms like 'eat a little fresh air' do not have a pleasing effect.

Also, one wonders whether any effect of realism is achieved by Anand's device of making what a character speaks in English sound like gibberish to another character who also speaks the same language in the novel. We have an instance of this in *Coolie*. The novelist records Babu Nathoo Ram as speaking on the phone; 'Yes, sir, yus, fot not de junction be tehana....'¹⁰ Anand distorts the words to express the amazement of Munno who has never before seen a person using the telephone. One can perhaps understand this as a striving for realism. But is it after all necessary when the dialogue itself is in English? This device is as bad as the vulgarisation of English words like 'General' into 'Jarnel', 'hospital' into 'haspatal' and 'doctor' into 'daktar' or the use of Hindi words like 'angrezi' and

'angrezi sarkar', when appropriate, apt and acceptable English equivalents are readily available. It may, however, be conceded that the villager's use of words like 'injan' and 'fashun' helps the novelist in a limited way to reflect an aspect of the conversational practice of the illiterate and uneducated villager since certain English words have become part of Indian languages and are pronounced by the uneducated not as they ought to be pronounced in English. But, apart from this, Anand's practice of indiscriminate use of Hindi words and of the vulgarization of English words does not create the illusion of reality he aims at for the simple reason that the dialogue itself is in English and that it is known that the villagers and coolies cannot speak English. This device will be successful and have a humorous effect in a regional language novel in which all the characters speak their own mother-tongue. An Indian novelist in English should employ his skill in contriving a dialogue that is at once natural and lively, supple and functional. He may even catch the speech rhythms and the turns of phrases used by all kinds of people in the village and translate some of the abuse, curses, imprecations and proverbs to advantage. As Charles Morgan points out : "Dialogue if employed at all has to be infused with the author's style"; for the purpose of dialogue is "not to report a conversation but to communicate its essence" and "dialogue is not a report but a distillation, a formal means of penetrating to the essence of things."¹¹

I do not, however, suggest that no Indian words should be used in the kind of English that Indians write. What I mean is that English words in so far as they are expressive enough and adequately reproduce the speech rhythm of the vernacular should be preferred to Indian words, but there can be no objection as such to the use of Indian words when they are more expressive than their English equivalents in the context. This is especially so, because of the large number of Indian words that have already been absorbed in the English language.¹² The two reasons why Indian words continue to be used in English are that these words denote objects and actions for which English names

cannot be easily found and that they are chosen for their aptness of description and picturesqueness. Anand's use of 'Pujapath' is a clear instance of this.

Anand's descriptive and narrative prose has also certain drawbacks. Though a good deal of his prose is straightforward, yet it is often a mixture of loose and periodic sentences. Long sentences following one after another in succession very often spoil the effect. Moreover, occasionally he shows a fondness for a pompous diction that almost borders on the pedantic. This self-conscious attempt at an elevated style only betrays him into a trite diction. There is then a proneness to clichés like 'the milk of human kindness' and periphrases such as 'warm eddies of the brine' for 'sweat' and 'potencies of civilization' for 'the thing that decorate the walls and tables'. Because of these defects it cannot be said that Anand's narrative prose is a clean one devoid of mannerisms.

All this does not mean that Anand is not capable of brilliant and effective narrative prose. What is suggested here is that Anand's achievement has been vitiated to some extent by certain idiosyncrasies and purposeless verbiage which fail to compel the language to conform to his mode of experience. But shorn of these idiosyncrasies, his narrative prose approximates to the ideal English that Indians can strive for.

The question whether or not English would serve his purpose as a medium of creative effort was uppermost in the mind of Raja Rao when he wrote his *Kanthapura*. In his foreword to the novel he discusses the question why English is his chosen medium. English, he says, 'is the language of our intellectual make-up...but not of our emotional make-up.... We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American.... The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression even as the

tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs.¹³

Kanthapura is in unconventional language. But Raja Rao successfully renders Indian modes of thought and feeling into English in this as well as in his later novels, *The Serpent and the Rope*¹⁴ and *The Cat and Shakespeare*. This he achieves without lapsing into Babu English at any place or grossly violating the syntax and grammar of the English language. It is an earnest attempt to carry over and transmute into English the idiom, the rhythm and the tone of the natural speech of his characters. Raja Rao, in other words, achieves here a kind of Indian idiom, with its distinct echo of regional speech and reflection of local colour, without slipping into unintentional 'Indianisms'. His achievement is much better and more satisfying than Mulk Raj Anand's. The following passage which expresses the nervous anxiety of the people of Kanthapura who wait for Moorthy on his release from jail illustrates this :

And hearts began to beat, and yet we saw no Moorthy, and yet no Moorthy and yet not a hair of his head was seen, and we were silent as though in the sanctum at the camphor ceremony. Yet no Moorthy, and no Moorthy, and the bus had surely passed by the river, over the bridge and up the Santpur valley and Rangamma got so anxious that she sent Pariah Lingayya to run and see, and Pariah Lingayya ran and ran, and from the top of the road cried out, 'No, no', and we all looked to this side and that and no Moorthy and no Seenu either was to be seen....¹⁵

Raja Rao's dialogue is free from the pitfalls we have noted earlier in Anand's, yet it does not suffer from any lack of realism. In its economy of effect it is the carefully allusive dialogue which reflects the inwardness of its Indianness fully and in that sense more natural than Anand's dialogue. This is so not only in *Kanthapura* and other novels but also in Raja Rao's short stories.

If his dialogue helps us to savour in full his characters' conversational hesitations, suppressions and misapprehensions and to appreciate the nature of the fresh developments that are

inherent in them, his narrative prose shows that he has mastered the range and flexibility of style with the pattern of his novels and his concern with the abstract and the ideal demand. If in *Kanthapura* and *The Cow of the Barricades*, the characters speak like villagers with limited experience of the world outside, those in *The Serpent and the Rope* show a profundity which is the fruit of experience and knowledge. The technical virtuosity seen in the philosophical passages in the novel can also be seen in his presentation of the physical scenes and situations in India and Europe.

Other Indian novelists in English too — whether living in England or America in the direct milieu of the language in which they write or living in close contact with Indian conditions and life — find English adequate enough for their purpose of depicting the emotional and intellectual life of Indians. Perhaps, in some cases, the success is only partial owing to a stiff, self-conscious style which though providing passages of brilliant satire and, occasionally, of genuine humour, yet suffers from a tendency to verbosity and heaviness, and a lack of naturalness in dialogue as in Balachandra Rajan's two novels *The Dark Dancer* and *Too Long in the West* or owing to fondness for clichés such as 'beautiful in her own right', 'elegantly perched', 'astonishing good looks' and 'superhuman efforts' (to get to a railway station at 9 a.m.!) and the use of a kind of staccato English slang in dialogue as in Kamala Markandaya's novels. However, R.K. Narayan like Raja Rao may be said to have achieved complete success. Narayan has said : "English has proved that if a language has flexibility any experience can be communicated through it, even if it has to be paraphrased sometimes rather than conveyed, and even if the factual detail...is partially understood.... All that I am able to confirm after nearly thirty years of writing, is that it has served my purpose admirably, of conveying unambiguously the thoughts and acts of a set of personalities, who flourish in a small town located in a corner of South India."¹⁶

Narayan himself, as Alan Warner points out, 'writes admirably clean English.'¹⁷ Narayan's style is direct and straightforward and is characterized by an economy of expression and vocabulary adequate to deal with the range of subject matter and Indian sensibilities. He avoids unique or obscure phrasing, and a too constant use of compound sentences. Syntax comes closer to the pattern of the normal conversation of an educated Indian. It is these things, as also the lucidity, extreme purity, simplicity, colour, verve and exactitude of his writing that account for the leisurely decorum of his novels. The intimate liaison of his language with the senses and its fidelity to the idiom of speech enable him to achieve casualness and realism as a story-teller. As William Walsh observes : 'Narayan's language is beautifully adapted to communicate a different, an Indian sensibility.'¹⁸

The problem of adapting the language to one's purpose is one that is common to all writers; not only do the Indian writers in English but also the writers in the regional languages like Hindi, Tamil and Malayalam face the problem. African writers in English who also face this problem have shown how well English can be adapted to reflect the African environment. Chinua Achebe, for example, in his *Things Fall Apart*, achieves this, by drawing his images out of his surroundings and from traditional African sources instead of lifting them from British literary English.¹⁹

Wherever the creative writer wields the language with honesty and in the free certainty of his own vision, not only does the language become his but he remakes the language. English, though not native to the Indian soil, can be adapted by the Indian writer to the needs of expressing the subtle nuances of Indian thought and tradition without being grossly misused. Whatever merit the Indian languages can claim to have for expressing the life of the Indian people and the distinctiveness of the values of Indian life is possessed by English too. The fact that it is a world-language makes it in a sense a better medium of creative effort than our own regional languages in so far as what is

written in the regional languages has to be translated into English before it can hope to reach an audience all over India and the world. A writer whether he is Indian, American or British, writing in English or for that matter in any other language, therefore will do well to remember what Joseph Conrad, a novelist whose native language was Polish not English, has said about the problems involved in recording their vision in words on paper. According to him 'only through complete unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance...an unremitting never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour....'²⁰

Commenting on the dilemma faced by the Indian creative writer in the choice of a medium, John Wain says in his *Essays on Literature and Ideas* that if he were in the position of an Indian writer hesitating between English and Marathi he would certainly choose 'to write in Marathi and let the big sales and wide publicity take care of themselves.'²¹ But one wonders why Mr. Wain (in his imagined position, of course) should forgo the literary advantages which are his by virtue of his writing in English; for after all by choosing English as his medium he subjects himself to more rigorous international standards of criticism than the Marathi writer.

According to Mr. Wain, Indian English has been just a lingua franca and 'lacks the fineness of nuance that makes literature possible; and the simultaneous influence of American English and British English on the Indian writer's style is a drag on his creative expression. He illustrates his point with examples culled out of an English translation of a Marathi novel.'²² Mr. Wain ought to know the distinction between the English translation of a Marathi or Malayalam novel and an original work in English by an Indian writer like Narayan or Raja Rao. It is, however, true that the Indian writer's English does not remain uninfluenced by the impact of American English. He is exposed to this influence in the same way as British writers have been. A writer, whether influenced by British English or

American English or by both, succeeds in his task if he adapts the language to suit his purpose and handles it like a precision instrument. He may be moving towards an 'Atlantic English' or even an 'Indian English' just as the Americans years ago moved away from British English and established a brand of their own.

By 'Indian English' I do not mean babu English. According to me Indian English is simply good English. English that differs a little in vocabulary and idiom from good English as written in London or New York so that it brings out the inwardness of Indian life and culture. It rests upon the same basis as that which the standard speech of England rests upon. In the words of Prof. Gokak, Indian English represents "the evolution of a distinct standard — a standard the body of which is correct English usage, but whose soul is Indian in colour, thought, imagery and, now and then, even in the evolution of an idiom which is expressive of the unique quality of the Indian mind while conforming to the 'correctness' of English usage."²³

II

The creation of an Indian consciousness is another problem which the Indian writer in English faces today. In the absence of a common Indian language for the entire India, (which is a condition precedent for the creation of an Indian consciousness), English understood by a numerically small yet qualitative minority, is the only language that serves the purpose at present. Moreover, it is the best means of projecting the image of India abroad since the audience of the Indian writer in English consists of all those who know the language anywhere in the world.²⁴ But where is the nourishment for the writer to come from when the society he lives in and from which he seeks inspiration does not use English for its daily intercourse? The answer is that the Indian writer in English is not alien to Indian society and the language that it speaks. He is bilingual and he and that society mutually understand each other. And his work, though in another language the subtleties of which he has mastered, is bound to be a reflection of his society.

The Indian writers in English are also not infrequently charged with projecting a distorted image of India abroad with their eye on the sale prospects of their work. It may be that some of them are salesmen, but then this is so among all writers in all languages. For every single genuine artist there are a ten who study the market trends and cater for purely local and ephemeral needs, and one will find both classes among the writers in the regional languages. A writer worth his salt is honest and sincere, and for the sake of non-artistic considerations will not deliberately falsify his vision whether it is the image of India or that of the world. Perhaps it is true that a sincere Indian writer in English chooses English as the medium of his creative expression because of the national and international public it reaches and the long tradition English literary forms enjoy. Even then it cannot be denied that the Indian novelist in English first of all writes for his society. As a novelist he has a vision and this will be a vision of life around him. We may note here Lord David Cecil's comment on the vision of the novelist. He says : "His book must be less a picture of life than a picture of his vision of life, his interpretation of experience."²⁵ The function of the novelist is to give an original interpretation of life, which is also an image a generation needs. A great novel is one which contains a vision of life; it is this that gives meaning and purpose to his work. Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* does not get readily accepted as containing a realistic picture of India, but it surely conveys a vision of India. As S. Nagarajan observes : "Raja Rao's India is not the peninsula marked on the map, but an idea, a metaphysic, "philousia", as another student of East-West contrasts call it, distinguishing it from "philosophy".²⁶

India in spite of her variety and complexity is a cultural unit; she has an image of her own culture. When we talk about the projection of the image of India we really mean the projection of the image of her culture. If culture can be defined as the sum-total of all that is reflected in the mode of life of a people — their thought processes and outlook on life and their needs, aims and aspirations — then this is best expressed through the arts and

letters of a country. There is no better yardstick to measure the culture of a nation than her literature, which is "an expression of society". The novelist in modern India whether he is writing in English or in one of the regional languages is so much a part of his own cultural pattern that he cannot but reflect her image. By the term 'Indian consciousness' I mean the awareness that India historically has of her own cultural identity. To project the image of India not only means to transmit her own cultural identity but also to create an awareness of this identity in the minds of her own people and the rest of the world. This awareness also implies the consciousness of history; for the quest for meaning in human experience has always been related to the historical perspective of man's environment, or in other words, to man's awareness of a process in time and his sense of belonging to a society. India has undergone profound changes while seeking, simultaneously to form and preserve a sense of identity. The dynamics of her contemporary evolution *vis-à-vis* her traditions, and the realities of her modern life naturally are reflected in the novels written in modern India. Consequently, the Indian novelist faces the problem of giving artistic expression to the effect of economic changes and Industrialization on the community, the class structure, the old relations among occupations and professions and above all on family ties. The changes under the wave of Western cultural influences in family ties and community bonds have been felt not only in urban centres but in villages too. National movements, industrial growth, egalitarian protest and social reform as well as political ideologies are directly dealt with or indirectly suggested or reflected in Indian fiction in English. Dorothy M. Spencer therefore rightly regards Indian fiction in English as a major source for "a systematic study of culture contact and cultural change, with Indian world-view as the focus" for the Westerners to increase their "knowledge of acculturation processes."²⁷

Surely the Indian novelist in English makes an attempt to deal with the cultural problems of a modern India, even when the choice of a setting in a way restricts his freedom to give his

novel an all-India character. The awareness of India as a nation is at the back of his mind, especially because he is writing for an audience both inside and outside India. Here he may be said to have an edge over the regional language novelist whose primary concern is with the people of a linguistic area. The fact that he is writing for not only an audience all over India but also an audience outside India, however, creates an important problem inasmuch as he tends to explain social customs, caste and class distinctions and religious rites and ceremonies. These explanations do not always form an integral part of the story and therefore stand out in the contexts in which they occur. The detailed description of wedding and the rituals and customs attending it, with which Anand's *The Old Woman and the Cow Opens* is an example of this feature of Indian fiction in English. Explanations are, however, sometimes inevitable and quite justified in their contexts. That is why even a skilful story-teller like R.K. Narayan does not hesitate to give an explanation as in the following passage from the *Bachelor of Arts* :*

The light showed the thief to be a middle-aged man, bare bodied, with matted hair, wearing only loin-cloth. The loin-cloth was ochre-coloured indicating that he was a sanyasi, an ascetic. Father relaxed the hold on noticing this.²⁸

That such explanations are warranted by the contexts in which they occur is clear from a passage in *Chemeen* by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai who having written this novel originally in Malayalam might not have had an outside audience in mind when he wrote it :

"Then why is it that everyone hasn't his own boat?" Ayyankunju said. There was a reason for it. There are four castes of fishermen — Arayan, Valakkaran, Mukkuvan, Marakkan — as well as a lower fifth caste. There are also the fishermen of the backwaters inland. In

* The present writer does not agree with Meenakshi Mukherjee who in her article 'Awareness of Audience in Indo-Anglian Fiction' in *Quest* (Winter 1967, pp. 37-39) says that the explanation contained in the passage is for the benefit of an audience outside India.

the old days the Headman of the seafront would permit only a Valakkaran to buy a boat and net. Even then the Vallakkaran should first pay his tribute to the Headman before permission was granted.²⁹

The novelist writes to be read; the communication of his vision of life is his primary aim. Naturally therefore he cannot totally ignore his readers. As Bettina Linn points out, one of the important problems "is the reader, it is yourselves. The writer must think of you as well as his characters. He must often say to himself : Remember, the reader wasn't there! He was not present at the scene of action in the story. But he must be made to see it".³⁰ The problem is thus one arising out of the novelist's need for communication. It is, however, not an insoluble problem. A skilful novelist weaves the explanatory details into the pattern of the novel and converts them into what may be called 'a dense web'. Among the Indian novelists in English not only Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan but also lesser writers like Kamala Markandaya in her *Nectar in a Sieve* and Menon S. Marath in his *The Wound of Spring* have successfully shown that this is possible. In their novels, the details of the physical world, the customs and practices of the people are woven together into a meaningful and effective design. These details strengthen the illusion of reality not merely through their correspondence to actuality but through their relation to the whole vision the novelist is trying to communicate.

Whether or not the Indian novelist in English projects a warped image of India is a question intimately connected with the themes that he deals with. In an article 'The Modern Indian Novel', K.B. Vaid, commenting on the themes of the Indian novelist says that his thematic preoccupations are : "portrayal of poverty, hunger and disease; portrayal of widespread social evils and tensions; examinations of the survivals of the past; exploration of the hybrid culture of the educated Indian middle classes : analysis of the innumerable dislocations and conflicts in a tradition-ridden society under the impact of an incipient, half-hearted industrialization."³¹ Mr. Vaid's comments are with

particular reference to the novel in the regional languages. However, this is also applicable to the Indian novel in English with the difference that the novel in English covers a few more themes such as inter-racial relations, the national movement for freedom and the story of Indian independence, partition of India and the holocaust that followed independence. The task of the novelist in modern India is to deal with real India and not the India which has been a more literary region of Maharajahs and mystery, of strange spiritual quests, gurus and mysticism. It is a picture of this mysterious India that we get in Anand's *The Private Life of a Prince* and Malgonkar's *The Princes* both portraying royal life and its decline in India — or Kamala Markandaya's *Possession*, which is a weird mixture of rural life, a Swami, and declining royalty — all veneered over with the theme of East-West cultural contact. These and the few like them are perhaps intended to catch the eye of the Western reader. The real India consists in the lives of millions of men and women struggling to free themselves from poverty and follow the road to prosperity and modernity without losing their hold on their mores. But as Mr. Vaid says, lacking a psychological approach to the problem, many Indian novelists have failed to create adequately individualized characters. "In most cases, the largeness of the canvas leads to long stretches of dull pedestrian writing, peopled by cardboard figures and punctuated by ineffective sentimental exhortations."³²

III

The above aspects of Indian fiction in English — its themes, essential Indianness and its English — have given it its national character. But now the Indian novelist in English faces a purely literary problem; the themes which he has used hitherto have been exhausted and become stale. Even race relations and mysticism which had some sort of an attention in India and outside have lost their significance today. This exhaustion of stock themes, however, should be regarded as a healthy sign; for it necessitates his defining his position more precisely *vis-à-vis* the culture to which he belongs. The fact that he writes in

English makes his position all the more difficult. Since he does not belong wholly either to the Western or to the Eastern tradition, he has to search for new frontiers. This search for new frontiers is the adventure that invites the Indian novelist in English today, if he refuses to succumb to either the Western tradition or the Eastern tradition and decides to stand up by himself and search out for the essence of human living.

NOTES

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8

Myth, Ritual and Demonology

—Rama Kundu

R.K. NARAYAN, a novelist of international repute and recipient of many awards and recognition, is also the best loved Indian writer in English in his own country. Of course his remarkable gift of story-telling, the special locational flavour of his stories, the extraordinary assortment of odd, eccentric, yet charming characters, the author's own charming genial humour and highly enjoyable sparkling wit — all contribute to this popularity. However, the element that perhaps operates most effectively behind Narayan's wide appeal is his rootedness in Indian myths and lore.

Though not a religious man in the orthodox sense, R.K. Narayan as a writer has his roots in the Indian mythology. S. Krishnan has traced this back to his childhood memory of oral narration, — “undoubtedly absorbed from his grandmother and other old relatives” (1080). R.K. Narayan has also profound knowledge of Hindu culture, as may be expected from an author so down-to-earth and firmly rooted in the soil. He has retold *The Ramayana* (1972) and *The Mahabharata* (1978) as well as a number of myths and legends. Earlier in his career Narayan had written *Gods, Demons and Others* (1964) which culls mythological stories from Indian epics and *Puranas*. Even before that, in 1961, he wrote *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, — a slim novel that reworks (though with placid humour) an ancient theme from Indian mythology : extreme arrogance and pride proves to be self-annihilating at the end. This also echoes the proverbial wisdom : *sarbam atyanta garhitam* (all excesses are bad). It is

the story of a taxidermist whose arrogance and violence disturb the calm of Malgudi for a time; but finally peace is restored through his mysterious death which is later found out to have been caused by himself in a moment of inadvertence.

It is interesting to note how the author uses the myth of a demon, though apparently in a light vein, to tell an almost unbelievable story with the perfect ease of an oral narrator facing his eager believing listeners. He can do so because here he works on the reader's (Indian) prior knowledge of, and sharing in, the mythology he invokes. Moreover here the novelist draws upon the paradigm of a mythic ritual — the fall of a demon being synchronized with the celebration of a divine marriage. True, that Narayan's consistent use of a mild ironic tone of narration helps him to distance his narrator from this 'fantasy' world and keep him in touch with the 'realistic'. But beneath this surface reality the author constantly evokes and harnesses another world of "inner reality", to use a phrase of Soyinka; it is a world made up of deities, demons, beasts, lores, myths, rituals, and its own systems of belief and justice. In his discussion of the relationship of myth and literature in Africa Wole Soyinka dismisses the idea of 'fantasy' which he holds to be an individual experience; instead he stresses the concept of a collective inner world and a "primal reality" (33).

"The nature of an inner world in a cohesive society is the essentialisation of a rational world-view, one which is elicited from the reality of social and natural experience and from the integrated reality of racial myths into a living morality" (Soyinka 34).

It is to this "cohesive archetypal motifs of a primal inner world" (Soyinka 34) that R.K. Narayan turns for artistic inspiration and thematic-narratorial devices in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*.

In spite of his immense popularity, or perhaps because of it, R.K. Narayan is often praised/dismissed as a "storyteller", albeit an excellent one. Krishnan echoes but the general notion when he claims : "First and last he (Narayan) is a storyteller" (1080). Narayan's unassuming style, — the overtly realistic mode of a

genial narrator and the simple charm of his narration flavoured as it is by fine humour, has often proved misleading; precisely because of the charm which tends to fascinate readers of varied intellectual levels, and divert critical attention from his quasi-parodic yet serious handling of Indian myths. The author's own avowals from time to time may also have added to the misconception. For example :

"I'd be quite happy if no more is claimed from me than being just a story-teller. Only the story matters, that is all. If readers read more significance into my stories than was meant originally, then that's the reader's understanding of things" (quoted by Krishnan 1082).

one should, however, take note of the claim with which this unassuming declaration is clinched :

"But if a story is in tune completely with the truth of life, truth as I perceive it, then it will be automatically significant."

"Truth of life", usually a cliché phrase, is qualified by the clause "as I perceive it". This subjective element makes a world of difference between R.K.'s "truth" and the empirical truth of the so-called realistic school that dominated Anglo-European fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The "truth" that RKN perceives could have been branded "fantastic" by that other objective standard; because this perception accommodates another reality, the mythical or primal reality, — Soyinka's "hinterland of transition" (33). His consciousness is stretched to embrace this mythical reality which is different and 'other' than the empirical reality and may not be subjected to the latter's condition of plausibility or verisimilitude. What is remarkable is the perfect ease with which he bridges the two worlds/realities. It is an excellent and sometimes hilarious re-enacting of age-old Indian myths in the modern Indian context that accounts for the special flavour of much of RKN's writing including *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (subsequently to be mentioned as *MOM*). Parody also plays an intrinsic role in this 're-creation' in *MOM*, and the novel demands that the reader should also have a degree

of awareness so that she/he can catch the parodic overtone. The narration continually switches between the serious and the parodic as RKN goes on interstitching myths with fine humour, irony, hilarious laughter, fun and comicality, a practice that can be compared with Robert Kroetsch's parodic use of myths.

R.K.S. Iyengar suggests "perhaps *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* was itself meant to be a modern version of one of the Deva-Asura conflicts of very ancient times" (382). It is, of course hard to accept Iyengar's equation of Nataraj with Deva; the poor printer is too modest, small, and charming a mortal to claim that title. But Vasu is unmistakably the *Asura*, the demon manifest. Vasu, — a huge, strong, middle-aged man, a self-designed taxidermist — storms his way into peaceful Malgudi, exults in indiscriminate killing, makes money from stuffed carcasses of killed animals, prowls about as a careless rogue — indomitable and callous — disturbing humans and destroying animals of Malgudi until he gets killed of a brain concussion caused by his own terrible hands just as they slapped two mosquitoes on his forehead.

Almost a child's story! In summary at least it reads like that. But while following the full text one is struck by the way the author carefully instills the mythical content, — not only in the broad thematic outline but also through an abundance of imaginative and evocative details and suggestions. A few of these may be examined here.

Belief in myths and rituals is part of the common people's life in R.K. Narayan's Malgudi which is a replica of any small Indian town. Though the setting of the novel is post-fifties India, the age-old myths are still quite alive in the thoughts and ways of the personae as it is in their real life counterparts. Thus Nataraj reminds the reader at the onset : "I hung up (in the small press) a framed picture of Goddess Laxmi poised on her lotus, holding aloft the bounties of earth in her four hands, and through her grace I did not do too badly" (7). Each morning after taking his dip in the river Nataraj sits on the sand reciting a prayer to the sun to illumine his mind (9). Muthu, the tea-shop owner by

the Mempi forest has the firm conviction that "because the Goddess protects us" (36) there has not been a single accident on the narrow twisting road to the mountain; the goddess is supposed to have her abode in "the shrine at the confluence of the mountain and the plains. The portrait of Vasu may be seen and understood in relation to this frame. Placed in this milieu Vasu appears quite easily as an *asura*. Once this equation is established the story too follows a preordained course by which the *asura*, after this temporary triumph, will be eventually destroyed.

By his appearance, behaviour, attitude, ways and lifestyle Vasu may be clearly recognised as a descendant of the illustrious line of Indian demons. Though at one point in the story Vasu has been likened by some people with the *rakshasa*, Vasu's portrait is generally drawn on the large scale befitting an *asura*. Indian demonology, one may note, often envisions demons as beings of extraordinary gifts, skills, prowess, even beauty, which are only marred by their *tamas*.¹ Demons, as Indian imagination has perceived them, are rarely villains; on the contrary they often appear fascinating, even admirable, though rather terrifying with their excesses. In Narayana's novel the response of the narrator, as also of the author seems to have been marked by a similar ambivalence. They are simultaneously attracted and annoyed, terrified and fascinated by the black grandeur of this man — a response that perfectly tallies with the Indian mythic tradition which holds demons with fearful mistrust as well as a degree of fascination verging on admiration.

Vasu's very first appearance marks him out from the rest. He towers high and huge, — an obvious reminder of the gigantic proportions and stature of an *asura*. From behind his curtain Nataraj sees the head first : "a tanned face, large powerful eyes under thick eyebrows, a large forehead and a shock of unkempt hair, like a black halo" (15). His movements — quick, energetic, violent as they are — appear to be in tune with his appearance. He "pulled aside" the poet, "came forward practically tearing aside" the curtain and gave Nataraj "a hard grip". As he does so

Nataraj's "entire hand disappeared into his fist". Nataraj notes with awe : "he was a huge man, about six feet tall. He looked quite slim, but his bull-neck and hammer-fist revealed his true stature" (15). Vasu resembles the well-built strong-bodied demons in our myth-gallery. He is not uncouth. Rather in the details of his appearance — the black halo, the bull-neck, etc., he seems to be very much like the *mahishasura* at the feet of goddess Durga, whom the deity kills through the four days and nights of *navrat* every autumn. The narrator takes care to repeat the suggestion of the 'black halo' — the demon's habitual visage in contrast to the golden halo of gods — which helps to project Vasu as a quasi-mythical figure. As Vasu disappears leaving Nataraj in the tea shop by the Memphi forest Nataraj imagines a scene in which "this frightful man with the dark halo over his head" (34) guards some tiger cave in the dark forest. Again, as Vasu returns after his daylong mysterious disappearance in the forest "his hair was covered with dust and stood up more like a halo than ever" (46). Vasu's mysterious and unpredictable disappearances and reappearances (25) also encourage one to place him in the tradition of demonic behaviour pattern as it is envired in our folklores.

Like his mythical ancestors Vasu is also an aggressive, impolite bully. He is imperious and indomitable. Nataraj's friends are scared and frightened away by his aggressiveness and bullying talk (25). He is a man of "few restraints" (32) and no propriety. Nataraj is annoyed at his limitless curiosity and refusal to recognise proprieties (20). But none could care less than Vasu about these subtle things. He forces himself into Nataraj's attic without much ceremony. He openly appropriates the money he raised for a public festival. He deliberately offends the printer's friends without provocation. Yet the bully has an undeniable charm for Nataraj and, of course, for the reader. In spite of his annoyance Nataraj obviously enjoys Vasu's lively repartee. For example, Vasu's advice to Sen, the journalist, who always loudly analyses Nehru's policies :

"Vasu said, 'If you feel superior to Nehru, why don't you go to Delhi and take charge of the cabinet?' and laughed contemptuously. Words followed, Sen got up in anger, Vasu advanced threateningly.... I cried, "All are friends here. I won't allow a fight. Not here, not here."

'Then where?' asked Vasu..." (25-26).

Nataraj watches Vasu's authoritative manner almost affectionately as if he were an *enfant terrible*. His amusement may be felt between the lines of his complaints :

"his nature would not leave anyone in peace. He'd wilt if he could not find some poor man to bully. If he found someone known to him, he taunted him. If he met a stranger or a new face, he bluntly demanded, 'Who is he? You have not told me his name!' No maharaja finding a ragged commoner wandering in the halls of his durbar would have adopted a more authoritative tone in asking, 'Who is this?' " (26).

Vasu has no scruples and no pretension of scrupulosity either. In this he may be compared to the Greek gods and the Yoruba deities whom Soyinka cites as "catalogue...of lust, greed, sadism, megalomania and sheer cussedness" (14) and the two African gods whom he finds guilty of anti-social behaviour (22). With his indomitable, irresistible, irrepressible, uncontrollable ways Vasu impresses the awe-struck helpless Nataraj in some such way : "He was the lord of the universe" (32).

A look at the popular Indian mythology about demons helps one to understand Nataraj's response and view Vasu's 'halo' in perspective.

According to *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (Ed. Felix Guirand) :

"The Indian conception of demons is special to them, and moreover has many different aspects.

To start with, the line separating demons from gods is not very clear. Generally 'Devas' are translated as 'gods' and 'Asuras' as 'demons', but in point of fact both are essentially beings gifted with a remarkable and

mysterious power which is manifested simultaneously by moral and physical attributes. For instance, Varuna who enjoys a remarkable moral prestige is ranked an 'asura' while Indra, unquestionably less refined, is a 'deva'. Surya, the sun, is called 'the asura-chaplain of the Davas'" (334).

Later in *Atharva Veda* the word 'asura' is applied only to demons, and henceforth that is the generally received meaning.

Again, though the Devas and the Asuras are henceforth often seen at war with each other they come, according to the *Satapatha Brahmana*, from a common ancestor, — Prajapati. The only difference, though a major one, was that the Devas chose truth and the Asuras chose falsehood. "The Asuras at first by their lies won riches, but in the end found destruction" (*N.L.E.* 335).

A common scholarly assumption has been that among the existing pantheon of non-Aryan gods the Aryans had accepted and assimilated some as Devas, while some were rejected and branded as Asura. But that does not detract from the grandeur of the latter. As the mythologists say :

"The Asuras are a kind of very powerful Titans, skilled magicians and implacable enemies of the Devas" (336).

The imagination about 'rakshasas' also envisions them as different from, and quite above, the ugly cadaverous or gigantic ogre.

"The Rakshasas often have a half-divine nature, but whereas the gods often display generosity, kindness, mastery and truth, the Rakshasas display the most deplorable passions — gluttony, lust, violence, perjury — at any rate in their relations with gods and men. Among themselves they show filial and conjugal affection, good faith and devotion. They are great Magicians, and have power to assume any shape they wish. The city of the Rakshasas is wonderfully beautiful.... They practise all the arts, and by austerity and penance sometimes obtain great favours of the gods.

In general the Rakshasas are not by nature evil beings, but creatures destined by...Dharma to play a...malevolent part in...a (specific) situation" (*N.L.E.* 336-37).

Thus three important Rakshasa — Hiranyakasipu, Ravana, and Sisupal — are the three incarnations of a heavenly being who chose to expiate his sins quickly by playing the enemy to Vishnu. Each of these three had been formidable in their times, and had risen to great power till they fell because of their own arrogance.

Seen from the perspective R.K. Narayan's portraiture of Vasu appears to have combined selective traits of the *asura* and the *rakshasa*, the grand demons of folk memory, though humorously, and sometimes with self-conscious parody, in the modern context. Vasu is too strong a man to be ignored or escaped from (16). Whether it is legal or not he will have his way in everything, be it inside the forest or outside. Nobody or nothing can upset him (56). After killing an eagle, the favourite bird of Vishnu, he gleefully ridicules Vishnu in a recognizable *asura*-manner :

- Nataraj : Don't you see that it is a garuda?
 Vasu : What if it is?
 Nataraj : Don't you realize that it's sacred? That it's the messenger of God Vishnu?
 Vasu : I want to try and make Vishnu use his feet now and then.

Vasu also practises perjury by turning the table on Nataraj through his unexpected law-suit as an 'aggrieved tenant'. His insensate violence is such that no creature — from the tiger in the forest to the crow on the parapet — is spared. He does not believe in marriage. Yet he is consistent in his love for the temple-dancer Rangi, however queer the expression is. As Rangi says rather proudly : "He cares for me very much, although sometimes he is completely mad and picks up all kinds of women and expects me to quarrel with them.... He wants to take me with him to Bombay — that's why he doesn't want me to get lost in the crowd" (116-17). Rangi, who has seen Vasu from close quarters, and knows him better than others, is

understandably : "obsessed with the grandeur and invincibility of the man" (148); in her eyes he emerges as a larger-than-life figure. As Rangī tells Nataraj :

"You don't know him well enough. He is afraid of nothing on earth or in heaven or hell.... He is so strong and obstinate. If he thinks of something, he has to do it; no one on earth can change his mind" (148).

Rangī's presentation of Vasu vibrates with identifiable echoes; he is made out to be an unmistakable replica of the grand demons whose awesome qualities, turned to the wrong use, could be disastrous in consequence. Though Nataraj assures Rangī that "he is just an ordinary common bully. We know how to tackle him" (148), no one can indeed tackle him. Disaster is averted only because Vasu gets killed, unbelievably though, by his own strong fists. One point should, however, be noted that Vasu never hits anyone with these fists. After his death Nataraj remembers : "He had one virtue, he never hit anyone with his hand, whatever the provocation" (173).

At the same time, by means of a subtle irony, — tinged with sparkling humour as it is — Narayan maintains a fine balance between mythical overtones and the demand of realistic verisimilitude. Thus Vasu is also quite convincing as a middle-aged taxidermist of Malgudi with a distinct Machiavellian trait, who can speak Yankee talk (" 'Yeah', he said. He seemed to have picked up his American style from crime books and films." 31), flaunts an elitist education and background (17), and argues in terms of perverse materialism. He has an interestingly tilted and often inverted view of things which he calls his "philosophy". Thus he would justify appropriation of public money by means of a parodic citing of Marxism :

"Money is only a medium of exchange and has no value by itself, and there can be no such thing as your money and my money. It's like the air, common to mankind" (108).

Regarding his profession, *i.e.*, taxidermy too Vasu has his curious theories :

"After all we are civilized human beings, educated and cultured, and it is up to us to prove our superiority to nature. Science conquers nature in a new way each day; why not in creation also? That's my philosophy, Sir. I challenge any man to contradict me" (17).²

Ironically Vasu's 'philosophy' of 'creation' involves killing life. He also expounds his 'philosophy of human conduct' :

"Life is too short to have a word with everyone in this land of three hundred odd millions. One has to ignore most people" (26).

His 'philosophy' of marriage is also interesting :

"Only fools marry, and they deserve all the trouble they get. I really do not know why people marry at all. If you like a woman, have her by all means. You don't have to own a coffee estate because you like a cup of coffee now and then" (32).

He justifies his act of killing and stuffing dead animals as "a better method of preserving wild life" (98-99). Vasu maintains "it's easier to rear a dead animal" (123). As he plans to kill the elephant during the ceremonial procession he is warned of the possibility of a stampede. But that leaves him unperturbed. Instead he falls back upon 'philosophy' :

"If you are a real philosopher and believe in reincarnation, you should not really mind what happens. If one is destroyed now, one will be reborn within a moment, with a brand-new body" (142).

A curious bad logic governs Vasu's 'philosophic' ideas which, if not sinister, are definitely grotesque. Even his material calculations — for which he seems to have a sharp brain — take the grotesque turn, so perverse and cynical they are. When Nataraj tries to convince Vasu against killing a *garuda* Vasu instantly envisages a business project.

"You may be indifferent, but haven't you seen men stopping in the road to look up and salute this bird when it circles in the sky?" (50).

Nataraj's deliberate poetry is, however, lost upon Vasu.

"He ruminated for a second and added, 'I think there is a good business proposition here. I can supply them stuffed eagles at about fifty rupees each. Everyone can keep a sacred *garuda* in the *pūja* and I'll guarantee that it won't fly off."

He adds as an afterthought :

"Thus they can save their eyes from glare. I want to be of service to our religious folk in my own way" (50).

By the time Vasu comes to calculate the value of the temple elephant (as carcass) he has shaken off the frail facade of 'service' and openly comes out with the disgusting language of a criminal poacher. As answer to Nataraj's frantic appeal he coolly tables his horrible arithmetic :

"Has it occurred to you how much more an elephant is worth dead? You don't have to feed it in the first place. I can make ten thousand out of the parts of this elephant — the tusks, if my calculation is right, must weigh forty pounds, that's eight hundred rupees. I have already an order for the legs, mounted as umbrella stands, and each hair on its tail can be sold for twelve annas for rings and bangles; most women fancy them and it's not for us to question their taste. My first business will be to take out the hairs and keep them apart, while the blood is still hot; trunk, legs, even the nails — it's a perfect animal in that way. Every bit of it is valuable..." (126).

It is perhaps here that Vasu appears at his lowest and sounds obnoxious. Prior to this his outrageous acts and speech have been enjoyable to a degree, qualified as they have been by uproarious laughter or irresponsible but frank hilarity.

It may be noted that Vasu's portrait in the novel is not a static or fixed one. I deliberately use the word 'portrait' here because there has been no psychological exploration or study of the inner man; we see him through Nataraj's awe-struck impressions, from a distance, — and more as image than a real complex character. This image goes on evolving as the story unfolds. Vasu starts as a "bully" (26); then he increasingly acquires fresh dimensions as a bully, and assumes various forms

in Nataraj's imagination including the tiger, monster³ (40; 78; 80), rakshasa⁴, asura, giant.⁵ He goes on acquiring more and more layers of myths and lores around him, which intersect, interweave and enrich each other. Among these the tiger myth demands special mention. In Narayan's *The Guide* Rosie is seen by the other characters a snake-woman, an image that suggests both fascination and mistrust and disparagement. Similarly Vasu impresses the narrator as a tiger-man, the man-eater of Malgudi.

Years later R.K. Narayan had written about a nice well-behaved tiger in *A Talking Tiger for Malgudi* (1983). But Vasu bears no semblance to that amenable circus tiger who could be talked to reason and made peaceable by the holy man. Vasu comes closer to the terrible 'man-eater' who has carved a niche in the folklores of India, especially in the forest zones. There we find tales about tiger-men/women who would even marry a human partner but still would stick to the diet of raw flesh and blood.⁶ The roots of such lores may be traced back to totemism. In the forest areas the tiger was often envisioned as a terrible deity and a common totem. In the Sunderban area of South Bengal the tiger-god *Dakshinrai* is still a popular deity among fishermen, woodcutters, honey-gatherers, who often take '*bāgh*' (tiger) for their family name. Vasu has been clearly identified with the tiger through overt hints and covert suggestions. Does the author weave a thread of popular totemism into his mythic fibber as he projects Vasu as the tiger-man?

Within days of Vasu's settling in his attic Nataraj realises with dismay, "Now it was like having a middle-aged *man-eater* in your office and home, with the same uncertainties, possibilities, and potentialities" (27). He also notes that '*this man-eater* softened, snivelled and purred...only in the presence of an official" (27). This tiger is excited the moment he hears about another. Coming to Mempi village he learns "there was a *proowler* last night", and they saw "*pug-marks* on the sand" (33). At once he becomes engrossed in his discussion of "*pug-marks*" (34), paying no heed to Nataraj's entreaties, and the latter is struck with "a sudden fear that this man was perhaps abducting

me and was going to demand a ransom for releasing me from some *tiger cave*". He imagines the frightful man guarding the "tiger cave" (34). Nataraj also wonders if in case the tiger returned to the cave "would the beast have the guts to devour him first" (35)? Vasu disappears in the forest. Nataraj waits for him in vain. The teashop people who apparently know Vasu better inform him :

"When he hears about a tiger, he forgets everything else. Now he'll be right in the jungle following the pug-marks, and..." (37).

Nataraj decides to leave by the city bus, but is apprehensive that Vasu may suddenly reappear to intercept : "He could pick me up between his thumb and first finger and put me down where he pleased" (38).

As Vasu returns at the day's end he himself looks almost like a tiger : "There was dust and grime on his face, but also a triumphant smile exposing his teeth; his eyes had widened, showing the whites"; he had brought in "the head of a tiger". The description he gives of the pursuit shows the hunter and the hunted as two equals facing each other, one to one (47).

The place Vasu lives in acquires the look of a tiger's den or *rakshasa* rather than a human abode. Nataraj finds him surrounded with "carcasses. The room smelt of decaying flesh and raw hide...a resinous odour in the air.... I could not imagine *any human being* living in this atmosphere" (emphasis added 48). Vasu, however, is quite at home in the surroundings and remains engrossed with his tiger kill, bleeding, skinning and cleaning it (49). Nataraj is shocked to recognise his lost cat among the stuffed collection. But Vasu says nonchalantly : "I only wanted it for study; after all, it's the same family as the tiger. I am trying to make a full mould of the tiger. There are some problems of anatomy peculiar to the *felis* family in this area and I needed a miniature for study and research" (49). His obsession with tiger is obvious. Though he 'makes' various animals, big and small, the tiger is his real interest.

"This (stuffed eagles) is a minor job. I really don't care for it. My real work you will see only when the *tiger* is made up" (51).

Vasu's last work and "his masterpiece" is a stuffed tiger cub (161). It is perhaps significant that when Nataraj takes the desperate decision of confronting Vasu, holding him at gun point in order to ensure safe passage for the procession, he "started crawling like one of those panthers of the Mempi jungle" (156).

Thus with all the above suggestions clustering around him Vasu emerges as an extraordinary villain. Of course, keeping in tune with the jovial tenor of the narration Vasu is not a grim, humourless villain. He can enjoy himself and is enjoyable in a way with his odd humour and startling activities. Nor is he a sneaking, scheming villain, but a straightforward bully, rather impulsive.⁷ He has also one comic side; with his enormous strength he is scared of mosquitoes and this brings his end. Thus in a sense he seems to belong to the domain of nonsense literature for children. He also suggests a chthonian being through his strange ways. At the same time he is the lovable irresistible rogue, a popular type in the novelistic tradition. He is the insensate hunter who haunts the imagination of Australian and Canadian writers today.⁸ At the same time he is the traditional wild giant who continues to send thrills of terror⁹ through his recent manifestations in science fiction demons.

All these evocations enter into the making of Vasu, and the narrator's fascination for him¹⁰ infects the reader as well. Finally, however, it is Sastri's choric voice that leaves the reader in no doubt about the authorial intention that Vasu's story should be approached from the mythic perspective. During the days of utmost trouble when Nataraj felt completely helpless thanks to Vasu's brazen ways "Sastri alone grasped the situation and now and then threw a word of cheer such as 'These things cannot go on for ever like this, can they?'" (56). It is Sastri who first places Vasu explicitly in the category of a *rakshasa*. Sastri, "being an orthodox Sanskrit semi-scholar" cites Sanskrit proverbs in order to establish that "He shows all the definitions of a *rakshasa*".

Sastri also maintains, "Every *rakshasa* gets swollen with his ego. He thinks he is invincible, beyond every law. But sooner or later something or other will destroy him. He stood expiating on the lives of various demons in *puranas* to prove his point" (72).

Narayan's sparkling humour does not spare Sastri either from his genial bantering. Still he is allowed to appropriate the voice of choric wisdom which he derives from his cultural heritage of myths. So the final say is his. When Vasu dies Sastri mutters, "I knew he would come to such an end; these people cannot die normally" (162). Finally it is Sastri who brings to light the real circumstances of Vasu's death. He is not even prepared to accept Nataraj's praise of Vasu that he at least did not hit anyone with those fists.

"Because", said Sastri puckishly, "he had to conserve all that might for his own destruction. Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the *rakshasas* that were ever born. Every demon carries within him, unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self-destruction and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment. Otherwise what is to happen to humanity?" (174).

Semantically Sastri means a man who knows the *sastras*, and he interprets Vasu's rise and fall in that light. However, no attempt has been made to make either the character or his end convincing on the plane of mundane realism. This is perhaps because Vasu, who is clearly extraordinary in his odd way, is meant to re-enact a myth or myths.

As Soyinka observes in his famous study — *Myth, Literature and the African World*, man exists in a comprehensive world of myth, history and mores (xii). Myths arise from man's attempt to externalise and communicate his inner intuitions. Though the story is rendered in a dissembling and enchanting lightness of vein, Vasu embodies in his person, in that culminating moment, the awesome essence of justice as the author and his society perceive it. The achievement of this has been due to the ritualistic mould of the novel. The climax is made to synchronise

with an annual festival in which entire Malgudi participates ecstatically. Thus the action and the personae, to cite Soyinka's words used in another context, "reach deeply through reserves of collective memory of human rites of passage — ordeal, survival, social and individual purgation — into an end result which is the moral code of society" (9). With the restoration of order people go back to their normal life and work. This is preceded by another brief ritualistic sign — Nataraj daubing his forehead with the "holy dust" Sastri has brought for him, — "a pinch of sacred ash and vermilion...offerings from all the temples mixed together" (172). The narrator plays the communicant's role, whose consciousness is stretched to embrace another and primal reality which is different and other than the empirical reality and may not be subjected to the latter's conditions of plausibility and verisimilitude. The morality of R.K. Narayan's story is not separated from the total processes of life and human continuity.

To conclude, R.K. Narayan is the genial, smiling face of postcolonialism. Without exhibiting the anger, resentment, or assertive self-consciousness of cultural nationalism, he is still a representative postcolonial writer in another way. He boldly exploits and exhausts the indigenous elements. Though he writes very good English and is perfectly at ease with his medium, his basic Indianness is manifest at every turn through his use of themes, vocabulary, proverbs, personae, place and last but not least, use of myths which imparts an additional dimension to his novel.

NOTES

1. The Indian categories of *satva*, *raja*, *tamas* may remotely correspond to the European concepts of superego, ego, id respectively.
2. Vasu explains why he calls his work (taxidermy) an art : "We have constantly to be rivalling Nature at her own game. Posture, look, the total personality, everything has to be created" (50). He epitomises the arrogant modern man who gloats over the mutilation of nature.
3. "Anther monster" (50); "she behaved as if the monster would...come rushing in to swallow up the family" (78); "when night advanced the fear of the monster grew in him" (80).

4. "He shows all the definitions of a *rakshasa*', ...a demoniac creature who possessed enormous strength, strange powers, and genius, but recognized no sort of restraints of man or God" (72).

Nataraj's son feels proud that his father "killed a *rakshasa* single-handed" (168).

Padma, mother of Rangi, Vasu's mistress looks "frightening like the harem guards of Ravana" (81).

5. Mahishasura (72); Bhamasura (73);
Schoolchildren look for "some giant" in Nataraj's attic (78).
6. Barkataki, S.N., *Tribal Folktales of Assam*. Guwahati : Publication Board, 1970.

Mitra Majumdar, Dakshina Ranjan *Thakurdadar Jhuli* (Grandpa's Bag) (1907), Calcutta : Mitra & Ghosh, 1977.

7. "When I like a man, I like him, that's all" (16).

"He raised his fist and flourished it. 'I could settle many problems with this, but I don't'" (26).

I never hit anyone. Years ago I made that vow. If I had hit you with my hand — do you want to see what would have happened? "He brought his palm flat down on the iron frame of the cot and cracked it" (143-44).

8. David Malouf, a significant Australian poet, bewails the killing of foxes for fox-fur and stuffing :

"I slept across the hall, at night hearing
their thin cold cry. I dreamed the dangerous spark
of their eyes...the dark for stink of them..."

.....

(After the killing)

Among my mother's showpieces —
Noritaki teacups, fell hock glasses...
gold leaf demitasses —

the foxes, row upon row, thin-nosed, pic eared, dead"

("The Year of the Foxes") in James McAuley, *A Map of Australian Verse*, Melbourne : OUP, 1977.

Margaret Atwood, the reputed Canadian writer questions this habit of insensate killing in *Surfacing* (1977).

9. Some popular giants in the line : Aladin's obedient giant; Sinbad's subservient giant, etc.
10. "I admired him" (70); after Vasu's death Nataraj is "depressed to think that a man who had twisted iron rods" was to lie still and wait for the doctor to cut him up (163).

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9

The Concept of Hero in Manohar Malgonkar's Historical Novels

—S.I. Nurani

MANOHAR MALGONKAR has established himself as a writer of great repute after publishing ten novels. It is important to note that Malgonkar's four significant novels were published during the sixties : 1. *Distant Drum*, 2. *Combat of Shadows*, 3. *The Princes* and, 4. *A Bend in the Ganges* : These four novels elaborate Malgonkar's major concerns as a novelist. One cannot deny the fact that these novels, taken as a whole, constitute a consistent and unified statement about life and present a particular vision of life.

It seems, unlike Anand or Narayan, Malgonkar is an upholder of aristocracy. He presents entertaining and still valid portraits of sophisticated men and women, and they suggest some basic criticism of life. Malgonkar upholds conservative values in all his novels; and he takes meticulous care to pen the unpalatable aspects of both the aristocrats and the middle classes in equal proportions, without an attempt to gloss over the dark aspects of the upper class. Perhaps one of the most interesting characteristic features of Malgonkar's works is his heroes like Kiran Garud, Gian Talwar, Henry Winton and Abhayraj who are aristocrats. They stand for values. They fight for values.

Malgonkar is very class-conscious. His works demonstrate the Marxist point of view that there is a co-relation between a writer's class and his vision of life. He chooses generally his principal characters from his own class and he rarely steps outside his class for his literary material.

Malgonkar's characters cover a large panorama, as the action takes place everywhere — in a Punjab village, the Andmans, Assam, Calcutta, Lahore, Madras and Bombay. The central characters in *Distant Drum*, *Combat of Shadows*, *The Princes* and *A Bend in the Ganges*, are developed in such a way that the action ascribed to them is never inconsistent with their bearing or inappropriate to their convictions. The action is always the result of, or at least not in conflict with, the apparent motivation. There is a complete fusion of these elements; so the plot and character are identical. The main purpose of Malgonkar's novels is to portray the development of the protagonist's personality in a convincing and realistic manner.

Malgonkar is a keen observer of manners and moods of his men and describes in detail the workings of the mind of his characters in his novels and that's why, his characters present an astonishing variety. They are alive in every limb, both cosmic and serious, simple and deep, foolish and thoughtful. One of the most striking aspects of Malgonkar's characterization is the importance of masculine characters; one after the other, from *Distant Drum* to *Bandicoot Run*, the protagonists are male. Kiran in *Distant Drum*, Henry Winton in *Combat of Shadows*, Gian Talwar in *A Bend in the Ganges*, Abhayraj in *The Princes*, Nana Saheb in *The Devil's Wind*, Jaikumar in *Open Season* are the masculine heroes of Malgonkar's fictional world. Malgonkar's central characters, the masculine ones, reveal his vision based on what Henry James terms in his *The Art of Fiction* as 'the author's sense of reality' and 'a pattern of life'.

Malgonkar, in his novels, has taken up the most crucial movements in the life of a nation and portrayed them in terms of human situations. His canvas is wide and his characters are heroically fighting odds and struggling hard with inner conflicts and outer circumstances through a period of transition. His characters are not opposed to progress, if it can be had, by degrees, but not by revolution or at the cost of good things in the past and tradition. His fictional world is a world which does not fight shy of conflict, action and ideas. His novels have a rhythm

of transition and a pattern of myth. They have a vision to reveal and a story to tell. This Malgonkar does through his heroes around whom he has woven his stories. They pass through confusion in the times of transition when the old world, the old pattern, the old values, good or bad, were destroyed and the new world was not yet born. His heroes have an irresistible urge to fulfil themselves and their heroic struggle is not graphically portrayed. Malgonkar does not deal with 'character' or 'characterisation' but he deals with 'personality'.

A close study of Malgonkar's heroes shows that though they are mainly princes, officers, bureaucrats, aristocrats, there are also Gian and Jaikumar who come from middle class society. James Y. Dayanand comments :

"As a novelist Malgonkar is deeply interested in characters living in a period of momentous change."

Moreover, his heroes undergo conflicts and crisis which are universal, which try them and mould them into fully developed personalities. Malgonkar's world presents a fascinating study of the human beings torn between two worlds. The heroes act and react against the background of the social upheavals, national crisis and conflicts. Clash of ideologies and of individuals, clash of cultures and of institutions, conflicts between the forces of life and death, between good and evil, between right and wrong — all these contribute to the personal development of the hero. His heroes are rebels, thinkers, independent individuals. They are conscious of their identity.

Malgonkar presents his masculine characters as superior to his feminine characters. The women are, primarily objects of entertainment, playing a subservient role. Malgonkar never chooses women as central characters of his novels. When he portrays the corrupt manipulation of the bureaucracy, generally women appear as commodities. His novels are men-oriented where women play just secondary roles. Malgonkar's images of women are stereotyped. Generally the female characters are sex objects, sensual women and concubines. Their names change, but their identities remain unchanged. Malgonkar lacks in the

sharpness of vision in his female characterisation. In his approach to women, they are limited to the physical aspects of their relationship with men. The sensual women are described as warm, naked, deliciously wanton, docile as Chinese concubines, earthly, raw-boned Chandani-Chowk whores. In sexual matters, however, women are more aggressive than men. Malgonkar does not shut eyes to fact that the roots of corruption and depravity in high society lie in the capitalist ideology; but as a matter of fact, he plays on surfaces, simply highlighting the lust and the cupidity of the aristocratic life. Malgonkar defends the kings and the princes and exhibits his indirect admiration for the ruling class or its ideology. His heroes are drawn directly from the strata of life he knew so well. His portraits of army officers, soldiers, bureaucratic officers, princes and westernized men and women are truly remarkable. With a deep insight and keen observation, he presents a fine gallery of portraits of well-polished characters. His heroes represent the chivalry and the valour of the anglicized upper class, the new aristocracy of British India which is the main staple of his novels.

One of the important changes levelled against Malgonkar has to do with his choice of characters. V.S. Naipaul mentions that Malgonkar does not portray the common Indian life and its realities, that his characters are princes and ruling class people. Malgonkar himself is conscious of this fact and he has asserted that his own experiences are of this society and he cannot present the experience of any other class of society. At the centre of each novel are conflicts; the hero faces, as a member of a society or as an individual, cultural or ideological, social or philosophical conflicts. It is the hero against himself, his roots, his culture, his society. Examined from this angle, Malgonkar's novels depict life in all its varied colours.

Malgonkar is concerned with all the multifarious experiences in the hero's life and values evolving from these and from his racial culture. If Malgonkar upholds the traditional princely virtues he also presents the vices and weaknesses of the princely order. If his heroes are conservative and rebels, there is certainly

a fine balancing of the traditional virtues and liberal attitudes. Malgonkar's art of characterisation is superb. His heroes are often types, but at the same time, they are individuals with strongly defined personalities.

It seems that in his novels, Malgonkar searches for a code of heroism that is capable of sustaining men in the critical time of war (including civil war) and revolution. It is perhaps this consistent pattern in the author's mind that brings about certain similarity in all the heroes. Referring to this aspect, Prof. James Dayanand remarks :

'All the protagonists are young men; all the novels are set in particular parts of India, generally northern India; and all the novels deal with the period of Indian history concerned with India's struggle for independence. The young men go through more or less the same period in all novels (except *The Devil's Wind*) in more or less the same geographical area in India.'

This point of similarity is noticed by almost all the critics of the novels of Malgonkar. A sort of common code of conduct for the heroes can be formulated from his novels. It seems that Malgonkar's ideal code — the Satpura Code is that of the ex-British Indian Army combined with the heroic virtues of the old Indian aristocracy. As per the elements of the code, a Satpura Code hero is, first and foremost, a gentleman; he is not expected to do anything against the 'izzat' and he should always finish off his own tigers, when two of them bet, only one should check up and the other should always take his word. He should not say that he does not know : because he should take his professional responsibilities very seriously. The code is wide, elastic and rigid too. Every Satpura Code hero is expected to try to live upon the code, even though it is not always possible to succeed. There is a blend of freedom and discipline in the Code. It is a code of honour, where any sort of cowardice is considered as the irredeemable sin. The Code is essentially secular in nature.

The name Satpura seems to have been derived from the Satpura Hills, difficult to cross because of impenetrable jungles

and valleys. Kiran Garud is a staunch upholder of Satpura Code. Abhayraj is a gentleman. Mr. Moreton and Tony Sykes initiate him into the Code — the gentlemanly or Satpura Code. In Malgonkar's novels :

'Malgonkar searches for a code of heroism that is capable of sustaining men in the critical testing time of war (including civil war) and revolution.'³

Distant Drum is an exposition of a story of success and a narration of the process of self-realization of the hero, Kiran Garud. It is a human story of struggle and success and the final achievement of the goal of the hero Kiran Garud. Kiran Garud is young and masculine. The novel deals with the education of Kiran and the development of Kiran's personality as an Army Officer. The major parts of the novel are related to the hero's moral and intellectual evolution — an authentic documentation of Army life which observes certain essential code of behaviour. Malgonkar himself says :

This book is largely the story of success or failure of the efforts of one of the officers of the Regiment to live up to its code.⁴

Kiran is portrayed as gentle, brave, courageous, manly and adventurous. He is a staunch upholder of the Satpura Code values. He tries to follow the Code. He is dominant, dynamic and active. He is influenced by Ropey Booker. Kiran faces hurdles, passes tests in his career and love. He is a devoted officer. He is tolerant, calm and patient. The army's motto teaches him the leadership qualities, devotion, sacrificial qualities, brotherhood, and selfless service. He learns these things under the training of the British Officer and he is turned into another British Officer. He has a sense of honour and pride for his army and nation. We find these qualities when he encounters Colonel Manners in the mess. Kiran faces hurdles in his career. He is transferred due to his love affair with Bina Sonal. He gets supporters, helpers, at the time of tests and hurdles. Kiran's encounter with the Accounts Department shows his bravery, fortitude, firmness, strength and courage.

Kiran faces the problem of red-tapism in the Accounts Department. Red-tapism, procrastination and delay in taking decision, which became the integral part of Army after the Independence, created hurdles in the ways of prompt and honest officers like Kiran. Kiran accepts the challenge and finally wins.

Kiran is in love with Bina Sonal; but even then, he would not sacrifice his career, his devotion to the Army for his beloved Bina. Kiran is free, fair and frank by nature. Kiran's confrontation with Govind Ram Sonal, Bina's father, accentuates the clash between the Satpura Code and the Civilian Code. Though Mr. Sonal arranges the transfer of Kiran, Kiran neither blames him nor complains against him. It shows his broad mind, courage and nobility.

Kiran's friendship with Abdul Jamal is a unique one; it shows Kiran's liberal views. He meets Abdul Jamal after the partition of the country in No-man's land. It created a conflict in Kiran's life, but Kiran is saved by Spike Buller. The friendship between Kiran and Abdul Jamal proves Kiran secular and free from religious and racial prejudices. Kiran helped Abdul Jamal and Abdul Jamal helped Kiran twice by giving evidence in Bob Medley's case and in the communal riot. Kiran takes risks in meeting Abdul Jamal even though Abdul Jamal is his enemy Army officer of Pakistan.

Kiran's encounter with Margot Medley creates a conflict in his life. Kiran rejects the proposal of Rokey Booker for a private job and remains a true soldier, an Army officer forever. He becomes more matured. At the end of the novel, Kiran gets success in his love and career and he achieves a sense of self-realization, Kiran, due to his Satpura Code and the positive values in life, emerges as a Code Hero. The novel *Distant Drum* shows the growth of a shy and awkward Second Lieutenant to a self-possessed and devoted Commanding Officer of a regiment, a man who tries to live up to the code, the gentlemanly code, the Satpura Code.

Kiran Garud is a Code Hero, as we find in Hemingway's novels. Kiran's Satpura Code is the code of manliness,

gentleness, a code of courage and honour. Kiran represents a code according to which by observing, it would be possible to live properly in the world of violence, disorder and misery. Thus being the Satpura Code Hero, Kiran offers and exemplifies certain principles of honour, courage and endurance which in a life of tension and pain make a man a man and enable him to conduct himself well in the losing battle that is life. He shows grace under pressure. What C.M. Bowra says about the Hero's achievement and character, is apt also in the case of Kiran :

"...in a blaze of glory which illumines his whole achievement and character."⁵

In his second novel *Combat of Shadows*, the hero is young and masculine, Malgonkar makes his central figure an Englishman with the norm of the British Public School code of conduct. The novel portrays Henry Winton, the manager of the Brindian Tea Company. He is young, active and healthy. He loves hunting and shooting. In spite of the difference in race and nationality, Henry Winton is decent, clean, well-intentioned; but soon, he finds himself in a demoralizing and dehumanizing situation which leads him towards corruption and moral degeneration. Henry Winton appears as a dominant figure, a man of power, a man of strong will. The Public School values which Kiran Garud in *Distant Drum* finds helpful in resolving his problem proved to be of no help to Henry. Henry Winton fails in his career and life due to his lack of the gentlemanly code. Henry's conflict with Gauri, Jugal Kishore, Ruby and Jean Walters created hurdles in his ways. He lacks in prudence and understanding. His relations with Indians, Anglo-Indians and even with his own race proved to be failures. Henry Winton betrays Ruby and marries Jean Walters, a white woman. He hates Indians and Anglo-Indians. His marriage proved to be a failure when he found his wife, Jean Walters, in love with Eddie Trevor, an Anglo-Indian youth. Though Henry Winton is a successful manager, he fails in his human relations. He refuses to appoint Gauri as a teacher, he hurts Jugal Kishore and thus he creates crisis for himself. He becomes a complicated man due to his decisions and rude behaviour.

Henry Winton is responsible for the death of Kistulal, a hunter-guide. He takes risk in killing the rogue elephant. He tries to maintain his status by telling a lie. Henry Winton gives faulty cartridges of Eddie Trevor. Eddie's murder is deliberate and cold as he was a rival in his love. Henry Winton could not tolerate the humiliation that his wife was in love with Eddie Trevor. The irony of the fact is that Eddie was Sudden Dart's son. There is tragic flaw in Henry Winton's character which leads him to his nemesis. At the end of the novel Henry Winton is burnt alive. His death is tragic and violent. Henry is trapped like a wild beast by Ruby, Pasupati and Sudden Dart. Henry's fate is a tragic fate. Malgonkar makes him the 'anti-hero' of the novel.

The novel is unique in a sense; for Malgonkar has an Englishman as his central figure and has delineated him skilfully, making him an anti-hero. In this connection Paul West observes :

"The anti-hero both unsocial and introverted to brood on his cosmic predicament. The anti-novel, so-called reflects the novelist's sympathy with his own anti-heroes."⁶

Henry Winton is unsocial. He dislikes Indians and Anglo-Indians and nourishes hatred, jealousy and envy. Henry is reserved, cool-minded, scheming, unsocial and unheroic. He lacks in the sense of understanding and also sympathy. His attitude is inhuman, callous and wicked. Henry Winton fails to understand human beings, human relations and the alien land so he is a failure in his life and career. He rejects the reality, the Indian past, the Indian tradition and proves to be an anti-hero. His actions, behaviour, attitude and deeds make him an anti-hero who meets his violent and tragic death in the end like Joseph Conrad's hero, Lord Jim. Through the character of Henry Winton, Malgonkar portrays the weaknesses and wrongs of man in the alien land.

In the novel *The Princes*, Malgonkar shows the conflict between Abhayraj, the prince and his reactionary father, Hiroji Maharaja. There is an ideological conflict and conflict with self. Both the father and the son take extremely opposite stands

regarding the national movement. Hiroji Maharaja hates the nationalists, whereas Abhayraj is sympathetic towards them. Abhayraj does not approve of his father's opposition to a dam over the village of Bulwara, his ill-treatment to the Maharani, his lavish expenditure on concubines and hunting; he stands exact opposite to his father. He hates his father who whips Kanakchand, the cobbler boy. Abhayraj is generous, courageous bold and a rebel. Nevertheless, he appreciates the good qualities of his father. After the heroic death of his father Hiroji, he becomes the Maharaja of Begwad and behaves as his father. His behaviour proves him a reactionary like his father. He whips Kanakchand when Kanakchand utters wrong words about Hiroji Maharaja and his family.

The story of the novel is narrated by Abhayraj, the hero and protagonist of the novel. He has lived through turbulent period of his life, as well as the life of his state which gets merged in the Union Republic of India, after 1947. The recreation of this life, retrospectively narrated by the 'I'-narrator, takes also the form of an autobiography. Dr. Amur has characterized the novel as 'an epic and autobiography.' The 'I'-narrator of the novel is a prince and he (Abhayraj) occupies an important seat in the drama of the dissolution of the erstwhile princely states in India.

Abhayraj's princely education, his love affair with Minnie Bradley give him a sense of realization and identity. Malgonkar uses the myth of initiation, separation and return in his portrayal of Abhayraj's character.

Abhayraj's relationship with his mother shows her impact on him. Abhayraj dislikes his mother's elopement with Abdulla Jan. He hates her, but also understands her dilemma. Abhayraj is influenced by his father. He advises his mother, Maharani to go away from the palace. Abhayraj participates in the war and wins a medal for bravery. Abhayraj resigns from the Army and helps his father in his administration.

Abhayraj becomes the representative of his people, their spokesman and exemplar. Thus, he is the hero, as defined in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* :

"Traditionally a character who has such admirable traits as courage, idealism and fortitude. The hero embodied the cultural values of his time and functioned as defender of his society."⁸

As the Warrior-Hero of antiquity, Abhayraj offered himself as a noble sacrifice in defence of his culture at the end of the novel. As Thorslev remarks :

"The hero gives one the broader, and deeper perspective of the spirit of the age which he represents."⁹

When Abhayraj is betrayed by Minnie, he marries Kamala and lives a happy life. Abhayraj sacrifices his title and accepts the common life at the end of the novel. Abhayraj leaves the ivory tower of princely isolation and alienation and identifies himself with the common man and understands the full implication of human values in life. Thus, Abhayraj becomes a Modern Hero. Abhayraj is found preoccupied with the amorous suffering; so his tale becomes a tragedy of unrest, possession and destruction. Abhayraj is the Modern Hero. Being the Modern Hero, he carries with him his rebellion, views, ideals, values and through them he suggests a way out at the time of crisis. The novel *The Princes* describes the growth and development of the character of Abhayraj from boyhood to manhood through several phases of change, from a sense of alienation and loneliness and innocence to a sense of experience, fulfilment and identity. As the hero of Waverly novels, Abhayraj returns to the peaceful society in the end of the novel. Alexander Welsh observes :

"Hero ventures to explore the opposite side of that ideal boundary, but returns safely to peaceful society."¹⁰

In Malgonkar's fourth novel *A Bend in the Ganges*, Malgonkar describes the growth and conflict of three young men : Gian Talwar, Debidayal and Shafi Usman. Malgonkar describes the character of Gian who is non-violent and a disciple of Gandhi.

In the family feud, Gian kills his cousin Vishnudutt who had murdered Gian's brother Hari and thus violates the principle of 'non-violence'. Like the Asiatic Hero, Gian gets a call to fight,

he murders Vishnudutt and returns as a victor. For the sake of brotherly love, duty, family prestige, sense of justice and revenge, Gian sacrifices non-violence. Gian is sentenced to transportation to the Andamans where he acts as a spy to Mulligan and becomes the most hated among the criminals and in the Penal Colony. Gian betrays Debidayal, his college friend. He runs away from the Andamans when the Japanese invaded the Andamans. He gets a job in the Kerwar Construction Company in Bombay by telling a lie to Sundari and Debidayal's father. There he violates the second principle, the principle of truth professed by Mahatma Gandhi. But at the end of the novel, Gian goes to rescue Sundari and her family from the clutches of the fanatic Muslims and behaves courageously and saves Sundari from molestation. He emerges as a hero at the end of the novel. Gian's problem is his relationship with self. The inner split of his personality in his relationship with objects and values — violence and non-violence, is the manifestation of his identity crisis. He rejects the political and cosmic order and stresses the psychological concept of search for his own personality. He emerges as a Modern Hero — a Psychological Hero. He is faced with the quest of identity which leads to the problem of salvation and redemption and survival in the spiritual sense. Gian is the Modern Hero who is in search of identity and he achieves self-discovery and gets redemption from his guilt by saving Sundari and her family at the end of the novel. Gian and Sundari leave their past behind and march ahead in future. The character of Gian is developed in depth, whereas Debidayal's and Shafi's characters are not developed in depth. The final act of Gian makes him nobler than Debidayal and Shafi; Gian accepts life with all its problems.

The Bend in the Ganges presents a deep and shattering vision of life and this is seen through the agony of the soul of the chief characters of the novel, especially of Gian. It is a journey from humiliation and cowardice, betrayal and deception to strength and tranquility. The novel begins and ends with Gian. Malgonkar takes Gian through all the stages of development and his growth

towards his moral maturity. Among the masculine protagonists of Malgonkar, Gian Talwar becomes very prominent particularly for his long and unmitigated sufferings. Gian, the hero of the novel, develops the traits of courage and perseverance and he achieves sublimity slowly and painfully. Gian remains superior even though he lies, deceives and forgets the principles of truth and non-violence. His final act of rescuing Sundari and her family makes him noble, powerful and superior to the other characters in the novel. What Welsh observes in the following words about Hero in Waverly novels is true about Gian :

"Hero ventures to explore the opposite side of that ideal boundary but returns safely to peaceful society."¹¹

At the end of the novel Gian returns along with Sundari to free India.

Malgonkar's main interest lies in the human involvement and the progress of the hero who either emerges victorious or is crushed and defeated in the process of life. The pattern of the hero's moral growth either culminates in his self-realization or his realization of the inadequacy of his individual dream and his future in life. One has to assume that it is only by design that there evolves slowly through the novels of Malgonkar a clear image of his hero. He unfolds an image which includes almost all aspects of human endeavour. None of his heroes can be called an extraordinary and exemplary character. His heroes are just normal human beings through whom Malgonkar uncovers his particular vision of life. No doubt there are similarities. What is most characteristic and noticeable in his novels is the theme of initiation and self-realization with regard to all the heroes — Kiran Garud, Henry Winton, Abhayraj and Gian Talwar.

Malgonkar's heroes are certainly expressions of his own attitude towards life — a philosophy drawn out of his rich and varied experience of Indian life. Malgonkar's novels show that the heroes move and develop in a systematic and logical manner in a distinctive pattern, revealing a consistent pattern of experience which embodies Malgonkar's affirmative view of human life. Each hero begins as an immature individual,

searching for identity and self-realization and in the end he grows into a self-possessed and mature character. This is more or less, with a slight variation in each case, the pattern of development in each novel. It is this recurrent theme or pattern in the novels of Malgonkar that finally shapes his particular vision of life which is embodied in the development of the hero. Malgonkar portrays the heroic struggle of his heroes graphically as we find in the cases of Kiran, Henry Winton, Abhayraj and Gian.

Malgonkar employs the principle of contrast and comparison to make the characters of the heroes more effective and impressive. In *Distant Drum* the character of Kiran is contrasted with that of Kamala Kant and Ropey Booker's idealistic attitude is contrasted with the materialistic one. In *Combat of Shadows*, there is a sharp contrast between the characters of the colonial Englishman Henry Winton and the Anglo-Indian, Eddie Trevor and the compromising attitude of Cockburn. In *The Princes* the triple contrast is continued with Hiroji, Abhayraj and Kanakchand and in *A Bend in the Ganges* with Gian, Debidayal and Shafi.

The heroic qualities are so skilfully and emphatically highlighted that Malgonkar's principal characters gradually develop, quite convincingly into proper Heroes. Malgonkar's Heroes make memorable human beings as they are endowed with significant traits of Classical Hero, Romantic Hero, Byronic Hero, Code Hero, Modern Hero and also Anti-Hero.

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10

Angrez in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya

—*Rudra Prasad Mahto*

INDIAN WOMEN novelists took to writing in English mainly after Independence and achieved remarkable success. The most outstanding among them are, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal. These novelists have pervaded all spheres of Indian life and experience. They include the socio-cultural ethos, political unrest, East-West encounter, clash between tradition and change, materialism and spirituality, agriculture and industrialization, personal relationship and public interest etc. Kamala Markandaya encompasses all these traits besides having a feminine sensibility and social consciousness. The tragic vision of life in her fiction is as much pronounced as the individual's search for identity.

As an expatriate writer Kamala Markandaya feels again and again tempted to deal with the interplay of Eastern and Western cultures and feel their pulses. "For the un-Anglicized Indian she has the affinity of Sympathy, for the British in India she has the affinity of association; for the Anglicized Indian she has the affinity of personal knowledge and identification."¹ An Indian settled abroad, Markandaya has a first-hand knowledge of both the worlds and can be the most dispassionate observer. Though her art is "free from propaganda and polemics"² and even didacticism, "her work is inspired by a crusading spirit for the welfare of humanity and the alleviation of human suffering".³ In that, notwithstanding her flair for virtuosity and her ambivalent attitude to society, here is the literature of concern.

Of the whole gamut of Indian and British characters I have to concentrate my attention only on the British characters in Markandaya's two novels, entitled *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Some Inner Fury*. They present a variety of men and women and represent the Indo-Anglian conflict in its material, cultural and philosophical aspects. The characters bear testimony to their racial animosity, past-ruler's complex, love-hate relationship, fraternal love and kindness. The British element of progressivism, dynamism, materialism and individualism comes in the way of Indian static social structure, passive stoicism and spiritual smugness. Markandaya's attitude towards her British characters is marked by realism and optimistic revaluation in tune with the mood of the moment. Thus, while some of her British characters are hardcore racialists some are moderates and a third group is friendly, liberal and loving.

The important British characters in Kamala Markandaya's novels chosen for the present paper include *Dr. Kennington* or *Kenny* in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *Richard* and *Hickey* in *Some Inner Fury* (1955).

The first British character in Kamala Markandaya's first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* is the medical missionary Dr. Kennington, endearingly called 'Kenny' by the villagers. He is one of the most liberal and lovable Englishmen portrayed by both British and Indian novelists. With his progressive enlightenment and philanthropic work Kenny wants to heal the physical sickness of the village folk and modernize or rather westernize their outlook. He is, in this respect, the voice of modernity and an ambassador of the ratiocinative West.

The author has juxtaposed Rukmani and Kenny as representatives of Oriental and Western cultures and traditions respectively. Kenny "has the dual role of sympathetic observer of the Indian scene and representative of the finer traditions of the west".⁴ As a missionary doctor he is totally dedicated and values service before self. He has come to India leaving his family and his country to serve the ignorant villagers in exchange for no return. It is selfless service inspired by fraternal love and

brotherhood. No wonder, 'despite the external gulf between the "learned Kenny and the simple Rukmani, a bond of candid friendship is established and preserved."' The doctor not only cures her infertility and later her daughter Ira's, he also tries to cure her of her fundamental beliefs and convictions. Rukmani calls him "my lord, my benefactor" (p. 31). In fact, Kenny is every man's benefactor in general and Rukmani's in particular. He rescues Rukmani's family on the brink of starvation, by employing her son Selvam as his assistant. The doctor becomes the protector and virtual guardian of Rukmani's family. The bond of spiritual love binds Britain and India in the near friendship of Kenny and Rukmani.

Though Kenny and Rukmani are not like-minded, their intimacy is based on emotional and intuitive kinship. "It is not as much the feelings of gratitude and sympathy as mutual admiration and friendship that bind them."⁶ As soon as Rukmani comes to know that Kenny has returned to the village from home, she rushes to him with a garland of flowers "as a beloved would to a lover. Here the garland can be interpreted as symbol of ideal adoration of Kenny who is not less than a God to her".⁷ Kenny confides in Rukmani and informs her that his wife has left him and his sons have been taught to forget him. Rukmani cannot conceive the very idea of a wife deserting her husband, so without voicing her disagreement she means to hold the doctor responsible. And Kenny appreciates and admires Rukmanis 'strong instincts'.

The learned doctor feels appalled at the miseries and unprotesting resignation of the villagers. Rukmani stands for the traditional Indian attitude to suffering enshrined in contentment and complacency. But Kenny represents the Western ideas like liberalism, progressivism and protest. His sympathetic exhortation to Rukmani is an attempt to show her the path or reason from unqualified resignation. Hence, his advice is to cry out for help and not suffer in silence, Kenny tells Rukmani, "...you must cry out if you want help. It is no use whatever to suffer in silence. Who will succour the drowning man if he does

not clamour for his life?.... There is no grandeur in want or in endurance" (p. 113). This is the Western approach to suffering which sounds quite logical and reasonable. "It is here that Kenny comes as a retarding force, injecting a sense of realism and sanity attempting to make holes unsuccessfully in their excessive faith and hope and their blindness to reality."⁸

Kenny's attitude to home and family also comes in sharp contrast to the Indian cultural tradition. He regards wife, children and home as encumbrances and chains. Naturally he has freed himself from those chains and feels relieved without them as he is free to come and go and please his fancy. But Rukmani's view of home is altogether different from Kenny's. Home to her is a capsule of kinship and family a bond of affection. Rukmani is exasperated to hear that Kenny's wife has left him. She shudders to think of such breaking homes which is a common occurrence in the West. Howard Clinton in *The Coffer Dams* is also rejected by his wife, Helen.

But the fact remains that Kenny is a selfless missionary who has adopted India for serving her poverty-stricken, superstition bound illiterate villagers. He is that ideal of an "Englishman who has been nourished on the noble ideals of liberalism and has no patience with the passivity of the starving and suffering villagers for the amelioration of whose miseries he works indefatigably".⁹ Kenny has identified himself with the villagers and he earnestly works for them and feels for them. When Rukmani tells him, "this is not your country and we are not your people. If you lived here your whole life it still would not be" (p. 109). Kenny replies, "Sometimes I do not know which is my country. Until today I had thought perhaps it was this" (p. 109). Kenny has no patience with Indian people's submissiveness, their calm resignation to miseries and misfortunes. He also laments lack of planning, orthodox sexual morality, wasteful use of cowdung etc., resulting in overall poverty and misery of the people. The "eternal, shameful poverty" (p. 71) of the villagers is awfully disgusting to him. Again, in his liberal view "a child

conceived in an encounter fares no worse than a child born in wedlock" (p. 116).

Compared with John de la Havre in Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* we find that Kenny suggests no political solution to the ills and evils of the poor farmers. This is precisely because "Markandaya avoids beating any political or ideological drums. Even the English doctor who is appalled at Indian passivity does not unlike Anand's de la Havre offer a political nostrum. He too feels the tragedy of Indian life".¹⁰

In *Some Inner Fury* (1955) an Englishman, Richard Marlowe is the hero of the novel, the fact that indicates the author's attempt to explore the potentiality of optimum agreement between the East and the West. Kamala Markandaya's affinity of association for the British, in India prompts her in her second novel to deal with "the dilemma of inter-social romance and inter-racial marriage through Mira's deep love for Richard Marlowe".¹¹ But for the troubled times of the Quit India movement, the Indo-British connection seems to have overcome all barriers of race and culture to emerge as a composite identity. Bhupal Singh reminds us,

"In the days of Clive and Warren Hastings, when Englishmen in India were not so numerous as now, and when many Englishmen who came to India did not hope to return to their motherland, it was not uncommon for Englishmen to marry Indian girls. There was little prejudice against such marriages and there is no suggestion in any novel that such marriages were unhappily."¹²

Despite cultural incompatibilities and other inconveniences mixed marriages continued. In Captain Philip Meadows Taylor's *Ralph Darnell* Ralph Smithson's marriage with the Begum-Noor-ul-nissa, is a total success. Another instance of Anglo-Indian concord is the marriage between Cyril Brandon and Seeta in Meadows Taylor's *Seeta*. Even the early Indian English novelists were not averse to mixed marriages. To quote Raizada,

"The early Indian English writer, approved of inter-social marriages as a matter of political expediency for these

were expected to bridge the widening gulf between the British rulers and Indians. The marriage of princess Kamla, the beautiful and accomplished niece of Raja Ram Singh with Lord Tara, the grandson of an ex-viceroy in S.M. Mitra's novel *Hindupore*, or of a Parsi Barrister Rustim and Miss Osborne, the daughter of Lieutenant-Colonel Osborne in K.E. Ghamat's *My Friend the Barrister*, or of Gauri Shanker, the Indian Civil Service Officer with Miss Daisy-Pitt, in A. Subrahmanyam's *Indira Devi*, are considered very significant politically for they bring Englishmen and the Indian people closer."¹³

But this is not all. Apart from racial prejudice, the political position of the ruler and the ruled was in fact, a big stumbling block in the way of mutual understanding and mutual respect between Britain and India. "The growth of English power in India had brought about not the union of cultures which Taylor had dreamt about, but a hardening of the positions which was soon to assume the Kiplingesque dichotomy."¹⁴ As a result of growing nationalism the racial and social tension between the races went on mounting, embittering the relationship day by day. While the period after 1935 in India for the British novelists was, according to Allen Greenberger, the Era of Melancholy, it was for the Indian writers the Era of Nationalism. On the one hand, it mellowed and softened the British attitude towards Indians on the other, it made the Indians more and more militant and chauvinistic in their nationalism.

Against the backdrop of the Quit India movement *Some Inner Fury* deals with the romantic infatuation between an Indian girl Mira and a British official Richard Marlowe. It is "essentially a novel of love, the two individuals who love each other belong to the different races of the rules and the ruled and the novel studies the impact of the troubled national spirit of the early forties upon their love."¹⁵ In fact, their romance is ruined by the political reality of the times. Richard is a handsome young man "a creature of gold" (p. 196), "the skin as tight and firm as a silken sheath. A body that might have been sculptured — though not from marble hard and smooth, lean, flanked, its lines

and surfaces clear cut, unflawed and a warmth to it — such a warmth that could wrap you about gently or make you melt, or set you on fire and burn with an incandescent heat itself” (p. 197). It is this irresistible charm in him that makes Mira fall in love with at first sight. And quite unconsciously, she garlands Richard instead of kit on their arrival from England. But more importantly, Richard is liberal, sensitive and sympathetic. “Kamala Markandaya has warm appreciation of the Englishman as an individual, he is a gentleman to the core and is free from any feeling of racial superiority.”¹⁶

But this gesture on the part of Richard endears him to Mira who is all admiration for him. Her highly complimentary remarks are, “I think it is very sensible of him to dress for the climate — even if he had to borrow servant’s clothes” (p. 15). Moreover, Richard puts up with the sultry heat without any visible sign of displeasure or discomfort on his face : “He stood in the open, careless of the shielding palm, bareheaded, with his skin flaming where the sun left upon it” (p. 12). Richard’s adaptability and liberality is seen again when he and Mira go to a Brahmin restaurant and Richard takes off his shoes and sits on the floor like everyone else as if he had been used to it all his life. He pleases the cook so much with his praise that the man keeps popping in and out with fresh delicacies. No wonder, almost bursting out with pride Mira thinks, “there is no one at all like my love” (p. 161). Richard has also learnt many stories from the *Mahabharata* in his eagerness to appreciate India and its culture.

Richard is the idealized version of his beloved, the heroine-narrator. “Mira painstakingly shows that her beloved Richard is an Englishman in a million, a veritable Fielding. Richard avoids the English community, is remarkably at home with Mira’s family, relishes Indian food and clothing, knows stories from the *Mahabharata*, and is uncommonly gentle and gentlemanly in pressing his love for Mira.”¹⁷ Though passionately in love with Mira Richard shows utmost caution and restraint in his physical advances to her. He has almost imbibed the Oriental approach to love in which the body is thought to be subservient to the spirit.

Richard wants to make sure that their love is not mere infatuation but a long lasting spiritual experience. When Mira wonders at Richard's self-restraint he explains to her, "A man does not take a girl the moment he feels attracted to her, if she means anything at all to him. A man does not lightly lie with a woman when it's the first time for her. Especially, if he loves her. It is better to wait for her to come to him" (pp. 197-98). Naturally, before their love is consummated, they identify themselves with each other in course of their six-week 'honeymoon' tour. Richard experiences in the "sweep and surge of love" (p. 198) with Mira a merger of all nationalities and identities. "Racial and cultural differences do not in any way interfere in the novel with happy sex and love relations. The minds of Mira and Richard work in perfect unison and they are able to establish positive relationship at these levels."¹⁸ Richard has no parochial consideration of 'your people' and 'my people' (p. 138).

A noted critic H.M. Williams opines : "Mira and Richard never sacrifice their loyalty to their respective communities, but seek in love a relief from the eternal tormenting struggle of 'your people' and 'my people'. When they are lovers and are planning to get married, they believe that they have succeeded in asserting the claims of individual human nature and passionate love against the claims of race, politics and family."¹⁹

But when they are faced with a crisis, they rationalize their love by giving in to hard realities of race and community. Richard's attitude is purely realistic in that he holds both the man and the moment responsible for their estrangement. His words are, "Not people like us, and not in times like these" (p. 199). Surely there exists the gulf of the ruler and the ruled and the times are the most turbulent years of the freedom struggle.

As usual personal relationship is Kamala Markandaya's forte. She seems to imply that "personal attraction coupled with genuine open-mindedness to each other's people and culture brings them close to each other on the personal level, but politically and culturally, no nation can tolerate the domination of the other. The passions and aspirations of an individual are

sacrificed for a larger cause."²⁰ This reminds Margaret Joseph of the novels of Walter Scott :

"Just as in Walter Scott's novels individual lives are moulded by political and personal struggles for power, in *Some Inner Fury* the characters meet, and are separated or killed because of national events."²¹

However, the reader's curiosity to read Richard's parting words or see his parting gesture, remains.

The other important British character Hickey, in the words of Mira is, "a man toiling among people not his own, in a country not his own, for the good as he saw it and for a reward which most men, far from envying, looked at with pitying if not scornful eyes" (p. 167). Like Kenny he is a devoted and selfless worker for the poor and the helpless. Unlike other missionaries he seems to regard the service of man as service to God. Thus, rather than propagating Christianity his aim is to serve the villagers with single-minded dedication and to ameliorate their fate.

In the conclusion of the article it is appropriate to say that once they (Angrez) were our masters but now they are our friends.

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11

Mother-Daughter Relationship in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande

—*Rashmi Sahi*

“To make myself in your image
was never the goal I sought”

THESE LINES from one of the novels of Shashi Deshpande, represent the crux of a very crucial and closest of the relationship that of between mother and daughter. The fear, the panic, the suffocation and the helplessness is all there in the novels and the thought of ones ownself disowning one's own mother is the question to be probed.

The mother-daughter relationship has always occupied an important place in Deshpande's fiction. She has not valorized the image of mother as goddess, instead she has rendered more human qualities to her.

Shashi Deshpande, one of the eminent writers in Indian English Literature was born in Dharwad to the renowned Sanskrit scholar Shriranga. Literary atmosphere in the family and lack of constraints lead to a very balanced and clear view of many omnipresent dilemmas of human mind.

Our society is full of paradoxes and contradictions. Here a female is considered to be a peripheral member of the family, both in her parent's house as well as husband's. Throughout her lifetime she is unable to decide her roots and this leads to her insecurity. As the daughter is closest to the mother, this insecurity is rubbed on to her also.

Shashi Deshpande has delved into the problem of every woman in this hypocritical society where she is rendered a second grade position but is expected to be the lynch pin of the family. This double edgedness plays havoc on her psyche. She is confused about her own role in the society and family. Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the inner turmoil of a woman, fighting within herself, between her own knowledge and that thrust on her by the surrounding especially the mother.

In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the mother-daughter relationship is based on gender-bias and lovelessness. Saru, is the daughter of the family, deprived of parental care and affection. Her mother's hatred for her and preference for her brother, Dhruv is clearly evident from her actions. This creates a rift between the mother and daughter and forces Saru to tread on the path of rebellion. This bias is so deeply engraved in her mind that all her future actions are marred by this.

As the knowledge of womanhood is blatantly and obtrusively thrust on her, she hates herself. "A kind of shame that engulfed me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my mother."¹

In Shashi Deshpande's novel mother and mother figures are not the matriarchs to be glorified but the suffocative and authoritative figures to be disdained. Hence, the insecurity of impressionable years manifests itself into the wrong choice of partners and sometimes landing her into unwanted situations. Saru deliberately indulges all her life into those acts which enrages her mother and in the process, and in moving against the flow, drains herself emotionally and physically. The rejection of the mother is very pronounced in the novel :

"If you are a woman, I don't want to be one."² The root of gender differentiation in our society is unfathomable and Saru's mother is no exception. The dialogue between Saru and mother substantiates the point :

"Don't go out in the sun, you will get even darker."

"Who care's?"

"We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married."

"And Dhruv?"

"He's different. He's a boy."³

When a mother differentiates between her own children the boy and the girl for whom she has equally suffered and taken equal pains, there is no other torch bearer than for the girl child.

Prominent English Writer Bharti Mukherjee echoes the same view in her novel *Jasmine* : "...daughter were curses...god with infinite memories visited and gave girl children to woman who needed to be punished for sins committed in other incarnations."

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru's brother Dhruv is the fundamental factor of her mother's existence. On the other hand Saru is the burden to be eased and a responsibility to be fulfilled. After Dhruv's death, Saru is accused of killing him and her mother lashes at her.

"Why you are alive, when he is dead."⁴

The intensity of hatred is so overpowering, that her mother disowns her and dies unforgiving. Saru is left struggling with her life although there is no link with her mother :

"I hate her, sapping me of happiness, of everything. She's always done it to me...taken happiness away from me. She does it even now when she's dead."⁵

No mother can dislike her own daughter with such fervor. But Saru's mother was an exception.

"Imagine saying...I will pray for her unhappiness. Let her know more sorrow than she has given me."⁶

Saru is surprised to know that her mother died peacefully in spite of having caused her so much pain :

"What about me? Did she think of me at all? She died at peace with herself, you say. How could she, after what she did to me?"⁷

In another novel *Roots and Shadows*, the death of the mother surrogate, instead of ending the war between her and the

daughter Indu proves to be a culmination of a series of upheavals in the life of a daughter. The protagonist Indu, is the motherless child, brought up in a huge joint family of uncles and aunts. Although she has a father, he remains on the periphery. The family is ruled by Akka, a widow who had handled everything in the family with an iron rod, and could reduce.

"The elders like Kaka, Atya and others to red faced stuttering children by her lethal tongue. But Indu is unbent and questions Akka's authority."⁸ She longs to be wanted, needed, loved, desired, admired.

"I want to be loved, I want to be happy."⁹ The deprivation at this front leads the female protagonist to find solace in the company of a male.

Indu, also in an act of rebellion proposes to Jayant, although usually it is the other way round for a female. She marries Jayant, much against Akka's order. Indu leaves home :

"Full of hatred for the family, for Akka specially."¹⁰ And Indu was bent on showing that this type of marriage works. In defying the authority of the mother, the girl sometimes plunges into a relationship, overlooking so many negative aspects in the partner. In trying to balance this, she sheds bits of her self each day so that the balance is not bent on one side and she is not accused for the decision she has taken for herself.

In a personal interview taken by me at her residence Shashi Deshpande said that : "Being mother, daughter, wife is important for a woman but that is not the be all and end all of her existence."

In her words, she has shattered the sati-savitri image of a woman and has given them more authenticity. Children question their parents; girls fight for their right. This is a move toward self-consciousness for them.

But despite the tussle, there is a strong urge to return home, to the security and warmth of the family. In both the novels, Saru and Indu, return back to the cocooned existence of their families to impart a new meaning to their existence and to delve into

themselves. Here they realize the inner self and eventually are at peace with themselves.

Although mother-daughter in Shashi Deshpande's novels are at loggerheads but still mother is the most important relation in their lives. Shashi Deshpande herself said in the interview that : "I consider that the relation between mother-daughter is abnormal, in which they do not fight."

But the heroines also realize that the home and parents are not the refuge but she is her own refuge. Hence they after rejuvenating themselves, start their life with a new vigour, as the epigraph of *The Dark Holds No Terror* reads :

"You are your own refuge;
there is no other refuge;
this refuge is hard to achieve."

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12

**‘Go Home Like a Good Girl’ :
An Interpretation of *That
Long Silence***

—Parvati Bhatnagar

MRS. SHASHI Deshpande deals with the theme of marriage — the theme she has dealt with in her two earlier novels *Roots and Shadows* and *Dark Holds No Terror*. However, the situations in the three novels are different so also her treatment of the theme. But the message conveyed in all the three novels is the same. Go home like a good girl. Don't leave your homes and husbands. Retain your married status, maintain your marriage sensibly.

In *Roots and Shadows* Shashi Deshpande dwells upon the problems, of how a woman brought up in orthodox, traditional and rural background, has to cope up with when she gets modern education and has a choice marriage with a person belonging to the elite class tuned to western culture — the so-called modern society. In the novel *Dark Holds No Terror*, she deals with the psychological problems, of how an educated woman professionally qualified, earning not only the bread but also the butter for the family, has to face when she marries a person not so highly qualified professionally and having a lower financial, therefore, social status.

In this particular novel *That Long Silence* she depicts two different pictures of Indian women at two parallel levels — the lower strata of women engaged in menial domestic chores to

earn their living and educated middle class women of some financial independence. Woman at both these levels prefer to get married and maintain their marriage, for failure in marriage is considered to be a woman's greatest failure.

The condition of the girls from lower strata, as presented by Deshpande, is really pitiable — in fact it is so pitiable that the writer wonders if the age old practice of strangling to death the girl baby right at the moment of her birth was not less cruel than making her undergo a life long suffering, beginning at the tender age of 5 or 6 and ending only with her death, which generally occurs much earlier than ripe old age. The girl starts adding to the family income at that tender age, the way Jeeja's grand-daughter Tara does and she continues working and earning all her life. She is married off at the age considered suitable by her parents, to any boy who has one head, two eyes, two ears, two hands and two legs like any other man, not caring to know any other particulars about the boy. The only difference that marriage brings in her life is that now she has her own children to take care of instead of her brothers and sisters and instead of watching her mother being beaten by her father, now, she herself becomes the target of her husband's ill-tempered battering. (It has generally been noted that men do not beat their children, they leave it to their wives.)

The tale of girls belonging to middle class is different. They are sent to school and college and required to help senior ladies of the family in the kitchen and other household work in their free time, more as a part of their training. They get romantic ideas about love and marriage, but have no clear-cut idea of the person, who they think, would be compatible with them or who they would like to marry. After their school or college education is over, begins the period of waiting for them. They wait till some boy from amongst the various boys her parents have sent the proposal of her marriage to, says 'yes, I will marry her'. They feel happy to see relief in their parents' faces and feel

happier if the boy happens to be fair and handsome, is well qualified and has a good well paid steady job.

So, this is how Jaya's marriage had been arranged. Mohan had always wanted to marry an educated girl who could speak English, so he said yes to Jaya's proposal despite her dark complexion and Jaya had agreed because her brother had been in Mohan's favour on account of his good fair looks, professional qualifications and a good steady government job. However, the waiting period for girls does not end with their marriage. Instead of waiting for some boy to say 'Yes', now they wait for their husbands to return home, however, late they may be.

The attitude of women from lower strata is robust and practical. Realising that men are men, women leave them to their drinking and wife beating. For them there is nothing wrong or shameful in husbands beating their wives, in fact it is considered to be their privilege since husbands for them are a symbol of social prestige. They take upon their shoulders the entire responsibility of raising their children, many times doling out money to them to indulge in their spoilt habits. They maintain their financial independence by not reveling to their husbands the entire amount of their earnings and keep aside a part of it exclusively for their own use. They take pride in the fact that their husbands are alive, so they look after them and take care of them whenever their drinking bouts land them in any trouble. Women feel miserable when they lose their husbands. By losing husbands they also lose social prestige.

Generally the middle class girls' attitude to marriage is emotional. They try to take good care of their husbands and try to mould themselves to suit the requirements of their husbands and their families. Mohan had clearly defined views about what a wife may do or may not do. He had wanted his wife to be 'Suhasini' and not 'Jaya', so Jaya tried to fit herself into that Suhasini image. It gave her at least freedom from guilt, if not happiness. She tried to cut off those bits of Jaya which did not fit into Suhasini image. At her father's home Jaya had never

restrained herself, instead she had let herself go as their quibbles had always exploded into laughter in which everybody including her father had joined. But Mohan had felt so much hurt by her laughter that she dared not laugh in his presence. She gradually learnt that his mood was best met with silence. She would say only that which she knew. Mohan and his family expected her to say, never daring to speak her mind honestly. In due course, she learnt that if Mohan's sisters offered to mend any lapse they noticed in the upkeep of the house, it was meant to reflect on her inefficiency. Jaya had always been a bold and fearless person. But she tried to behave like Suhasini a nervous incompetent woman needing male support all the time.

She did not like these changes but considering them to be inconsequential, she did not mind them much. But what really upset her was the fact that in order not to damage her marriage, she did things, which she would otherwise be ashamed of doing. In the interest of her family, she would at times act selfish like the sparrow who kept the crow waiting outside in the rain because she was trying to make her baby sparrow sleep and allowed the crow to enter the nest only after he had got completely drenched and in order that he may dry himself, she made him sit on the hot oven where the crow was burnt to death. And all this, so that her baby's sleep may not be disturbed!

At other times, the fear of damaging her marriage made her do deeds absolutely lacking in humanity. She quietly left her neighbour Mr. Kamat's room while he was struggling to breathe his last, instead of attending to him, fearing that it would hurt Mohan if the other neighbours gossiped about her presence in Mr. Kamat's room.

Jaya went to the extent of changing the very stuff she would have loved to write. In fact she would have loved to write the stuff of an angry young woman. Instead, she wrote the soap opera Seeta stuff, which pleased Mohan and made him say proudly 'my wife is a writer. She writes in English.' She had

changed the stuff she wrote because once when she had received an award for one of her writings, Mohan instead of admiring her, had felt hurt and sulked thinking that his wife had exposed to the world their own relationship. He had been quite incapable of understanding how a writer can aptly transmute experience into artistic creation. She was overcome by a sense of failure to find her writings rejected one after the other.

It pained her to see that her mental state affected her son to such an extent that he never could have easy communication with his parents though the boy had established easy comfortable rapport with his father's younger brother Vasant who was himself a very relaxed person.

All this made Jaya feel very restless. In fact the whole nation seemed to be in a state of restlessness. She could watch from the balcony of her flat long silent nonviolent processions of strikes and lockouts of the factory labourers and the mill owners, providing a fitting background to her own long silence filled with untruths and dishonest, unbecoming deeds.

The thought of divorce or separating from their husbands rarely comes to the mind of Indian woman belonging both to the lower strata as well as the middle class. The lower strata woman, considers nothing wrong or shameful in a husband beating his wife. In fact it is his privilege since he is the symbol of social prestige for her. For a middle class woman a husband is like a shading tree, providing a barrier between her and other men. The status of a woman separated from her husband is dubious in Indian society. To have failed in marriage is considered to be a woman's worst failure. She is eyed with suspicion by all — even her own kith and kin and what is worse is the fact that she becomes an easy target for man's lecherous eyes. Such women are considered to be easily available to men. So, Jaya made all efforts, however, painful to her to transform herself into Suhasini, the woman Mohan had wanted her to be.

It came as a shock to her to realise suddenly that her long suffering silence had been in vain. Mohan had seen through her

on-the-surface docility. He accused her of never having cared for him and now that there was the fear of his losing his job, she cared even less. He reacted to being left alone in the house even for short periods. His sense of insecurity made Jaya realise that if she needed him, his need for her was equally great. In fact they both needed each other. If he was her shading tree, she was the mother earth upon which the tree could stand and grow. When such was the reality, Jaya thought 'Why live life like a pair of bulls yoked together'? Why not create the harmony of orchestra with each instrument playing a different tune, together creating such beautiful music? She must never lose self-confidence. How can a person lacking confidence in his or her own self build up confidence in others? At this stage she suddenly remembered what Lord Krishna told Arjun at the end of his long sermon : 'I have given you knowledge, now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do, as you desire.' 'Thus had Lord Krishna granted humanness to Arjun', says Shashi Desphande. So, if God wants each person to do what he desires why shouldn't she preserve her identity and be herself? How can she help others if she cannot help her own self? She must not let this conflict between tradition and modernity crush her identity. These are the thoughts in which Jaya engaged at the end of the novel.

The novelist also refers briefly to a third category of women who live between the margins of the two levels to which Jeeja and Jaya belong — women like Mohan's sister and mother who are not unconscious of their suffering like Jeeja is. In fact, they are quite conscious of their suffering like Jaya is, but they, unlike Jaya, suffer silently without protest taking the suffering to be their fate. This silent, submissive acceptance of suffering as fate is something the writer cannot reconcile herself to. In fact, it makes her quite angry.

The message which the writer finally conveys is that a woman's emancipation lies neither in suffering quietly like a fatalist nor in repudiating all claims of the family and society like a rebel. She must draw upon her inner strength, which her

education and knowledge has given her and bring about a reconciliation between tradition and modernity without losing her own identity.

NOTE

All Quotations are from Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, New Delhi : Penguin, 1989.

13

Treatment of Nature in Ruskin
Bond

—Deepa Vanjani

EDMUND FULLER in the book *Man in Modern Fiction* (1958), describes our age as the "age of anxiety...an age of schism in the soul"¹ where the major theme is not only the disintegration of society, but of the individual creature. Surprisingly our age has not affected Ruskin Bond's mode of expression or his themes. Consequently his short stories are not marked by cynicism and anger or a revolutionary zeal to change the existing order of things. On the contrary they are marked by an innocence and optimism revealed by his selection of themes prominent among which are stories based on the autobiographical element, on children, crossing of paths and nature.

Nature has played a significant role in shaping Bond the man and the artist. The hills, and the rivers, the flowers and the trees have all gone into shaping his personality. They figure in his stories very often and bind them together in a pattern. Nature thus is a dominant feature in the stories of Bond. I have had the honour of meeting Mr. Ruskin Bond in person and having a dialogue with him in his cottage at Mussoorie and hence I begin with his own words :

"I feel intuned with Nature, at home, particularly in the mountains, because in the mountains you do get a mystical feeling, there's the elevation, the austerity. The mountains make you feel small. Whereas perhaps if you are living in a city you are not aware of Nature. Basically, you're alone with nature and realise how insignificant you

are. So may be it is good for the ego, makes you feel humble. You do not find so many humble people in the cities."

These sentiments voiced by Bond, speak volumes of his attitude towards the elements of Nature. Over the years, he has established a symbiotic tie with these elements and communicates with them in an unique language. He speaks solace in the lap of Nature from the higgledy-piggledy world. Nature is in his inspiration. It provides him the impetus for his writing. "Living in the hills", says Ruskin Bond, "I never seem to fall short of ideas almost anything can trigger off from the world of Nature. I've lived in big cities and have been desperate for ideas."

Description of natural beauty is Bond's forte. But his treatment of Nature is quite different. While Shelley weaves mythology out of Nature and Frost sees it as a mesmerizing spell, Bond presents Nature in all her splendour so that it becomes a character in his stories — omniscient and omnipotent. Not many writers bring in Nature to the point of making it a part of the story, or part of the character or its effect on people. If somebody for instance writes a story of a tree they might just mention the tree, but he goes into more detail with descriptions of not just the tree, but of what lives in the tree, its effect on the people around it and so on.

Although Nature is a recurring and pre-dominant feature in most of Bond's stories, a few of them stand apart for an exceptional handling of the subject. The story 'From Small Beginnings' from the Sahitya Akademi Award Winner Volume of short stories *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* (1991) is one such story. It is marked by subtle descriptions of Nature in abundance. Bond has given some mystic accounts of the beauty of the scenes around Dehra. The following passage from the story bears testimony to this :

"Last summer I spent a night on the pine-knoll, sleeping on the grass beneath the cherry tree and I felt the power of the sky and earth, and the power of a small cherry

tree...it's a big world and momentous events are taking place all the time. But this is where I have seen it happens."³

These lines bring to our mind the following lines from William Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' :

"And I have felt/ A presence that disturbs me with the joy/ or elevated thoughts, a sense sublime/ of something for more deeply interfused.../ A motion and a spirit, that impels/ All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts/ And rolls through all things."⁴

Though Bond in the course of the dialogue I had with him, denied having any 'mystical revelation' from Nature like Wordsworth, yet he perceives in it a divine presence.

Similarly in Binya, the protagonist of the story "Binya Passes By" from the volume *Our Trees Still Grows In Dehra* (1991), Bond sees a primeval innocence, an unconcern with the passing of events, an affinity with the forest and the mountains, Binya is reminiscent of Wordsworth's Lucy who grew 'under sun and shower' and absorbed the beauty and innocence of Nature.

Bond has a penchant for details as those of colour, texture, shape, smells and sights, which he religiously lays down in his stories as for instance in 'The Prospect of Flowers' from the volume entitled *The Night Train at Deoli* (1988). This story highlights his elaborate knowledge of the different varieties of flowers in the hills.

His meticulous observation of the cycle of Nature finds expression in the story 'Bus Stop Pipalnagar' again from *The Night Train*...the author has not only captured the essence of life in a small-town with its warmth and friendliness, the scenery of the landscape around Pipalnagar is also rendered beautifully in words. The following lines at the end of the story support this point :

"A land of thrusting hills, terraced hills, wood-covered and wind swept. Mountains where the Gods speak gently to the lonely, hills of grass and grey rock, misty at dawn, hazy at noon, mitten at sunset, where fresh torrents rush

to the valleys below."⁵ Nobody could have served us better with such a splendid feast of colours and with such accuracy which lends his prose a lyrical quality. There is a Keatsian sensuousness in such description for Bond too is keenly respondent to his senses.

This enables him to play down details of texture, colour, small and sound before his readers as is amply displayed in the following passage : "...the smell of pine needles, the silver of oak leaves and the red of a maple, the call of the Himalayan cuckoo and the mist like a wet face-cloth, pressing against the hills."⁶ It is like John Keats writing of "Autumn's red-lipped fruitage/ Blushing through the mist and dew...."

But Bond's vision of Nature is broad, for the reason that he does not behold only its external aspects, but perceives in its elements a deeper significance, an inner meaning. Nature pleases not only the senses, but also provides him spiritual comfort, particularly the trees. The trees he says are the guardians of his conscience and hence he works under their "highly principled supervision" to use his phrase. His attitude is almost akin to that of the Hindus who respect and worship the tree which is a valuable asset to the life of man. The tree cult can be traced to the Vedic times. Chitrlekha Singh and Prem Nath in their book entitled *Hinduism* have expressed the following view : "The waving of leaves of trees, it was believed by primitive minds, showed that the tree held spirits. Grooves of tree have been looked upon as the abode of Gods since time immemorial."⁷

Due to this deeply rooted love for them, Bond has made a plea for stopping the relentless cutting down of trees which is disturbing the delicate balance of Nature. Man in his ruthless urban advance has destroyed Nature's harmony which has produced devastating results. Bond's obsession with trees has come down to him from his father so much so that the prospect of a world without trees is a nightmare to him. Hence the ardent plea for the preservation of trees. Bond's writing is a brilliant record of his concern for the environment. There may not be a vehement expression of the affairs of the modern world in his

stories, but concern for the preservation of Nature is a recurring theme. In his book *Rain in the Mountains* writes : "I am told that this entire region (Tehri & Devprayag) is 'eco-fragile', one, of those words bandied around at seminars all over the world. I am not an expert in these matters...but I should think most of our earth is eco-fragile, having had to put up with hundreds of thousands of years of human civilization."⁸

Bond described his love for Nature as "instinctive" (but also accepts that his attitude has been influenced by Thoreau's *Walden* and Richard Jefferie's *The Story of My Heart*). The enchantments of Nature are medicinal for him, they sober and heal. Cities on the other hand do not give the human senses room enough. It is therefore that Bond has chosen to make the hills his home. For him the essence of life is in the smell of the wet earth, in the embrace of the mountains and the benediction of trees. For these he came back from England and for these he has chosen to live in Mussoorie.

Living in the midst of Nature he has evolved a strange and inseparable bond with its elements. Being a humanist who reveres life in all its forms, he lends a humanizing trait to Nature so that his trees whisper and outstretch their arms and his mountains beckon him nearer. Bond's writing make us creep out of our closed and cloistered homes into the morning and the evening and see what majestic beauties daily wrap us in their bosom. These enchantments persuade us to quit our lives of petty things and live with them. It would be apt to end with the following lines from Thoreau's *Walden* which seem to echo Bond's vision :

"In the sunshine and the crowing of cocks I feel an illimitable holiness, which makes me bless God and myself. The warm sun casts his incessant gift at my feet as I walk along, unfolding his yellow worlds."⁹

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14

The Influence of Indian English on Arun Joshi

—*Ashok Kumar Bachchan*

ENGLISH MAY be traditionally the native language of England but it has now become the native language of so many countries. The two main native varieties are British English and American English. These two national standards are overwhelmingly predominant both in the number of distinctive usages and in the degree to which these distinctions are institutionalized. The spatial varieties of English have resulted in so many national varieties beside British and American such as Canadian English, Caribbean English, African English, New Zealand English and Indian English, besides so many other minor national varieties. There are varieties within varieties to such an extent that they talk of so many Englishes.

English in India is the by-product of the British colonial rule over us. It was brought to India by the mercenaries of East India company and spread first by the Christian missionaries and later by the British administration when India became a subject nation of the British Empire. The advent of English in India coincides with its westward voyage across the Atlantic to North America in the very first decade of the 17th century. Indian English is a non-native variety as it is not our mother-tongue but the second language, useful both in the national and international contexts. Its importance as a language of knowledge is attested by Chakraborty Rajagopalachary who characterized it as the 'gift of the goddess Saraswati to India.'¹ R.K. Narayan calls it 'the

only non-regional Indian language.² English has now a constitutional status as one of the Indian languages. A creative writer is free to choose his linguistic medium. It is a linguistic fundamentalism to say that a creative writer should not use the language of another nation. Creative writers in India have selected English as a medium for the simple reason that they know it and can communicate the ideas too. The English-knowing Indian readers outnumber the population of England. It has been said that after England and the U.S.A., India is the third largest publisher of books in the world.

Among the non-native varieties of English the standard of Indian English is fairly high, both in its spoken and written forms among the Commonwealth countries. In the last decade of the twentieth century many Indian English novelists have been acclaimed internationally for their creative works and won fabulous prize money out of the sales of their novels.

II

English, the native language of United Kingdom and the United States of America, has been Indianized in our country. Several creative writers writing in English and eminent Indian scholars of English have commented upon the propriety of the use of Indianized English and other aspects of the problem. Raja Rao writes in the Foreword to *Kanthapura* :

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up-like Sanskrit or Persian was before — but not of our emotional make-up.... We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be a distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American.³

The above statement has proved almost prophetic and English has become one of the Indian languages. Mulk Raj Anand too has written in favour of the Indianization of English. Despite his mastery of British English during his stay in England he has come out in favour of writing English suited to the Indian milieu :

All the same, in my fictional writings I continued to follow the technique of word-coinage from Punjabi and Hindustani. I would transliterate dialogue almost literally from the original speech and I would, consciously, find myself inter-weaving feelings, emotions, moods and thoughts, from my mother-tongue into the texture of the narrative.⁴

Anand's efforts in favour of the nativisation of English have proved fruitful as Indian English literature now forms part of the curriculum in higher studies in India as well as in some of the foreign universities where Commonwealth literature is taught. He maintains that it has now become a by-product of our language milieu. This metamorphosis of English is a fusion of Indian language and English and it is now no less significant than some of the native varieties of English such as Irish English, Welsh English, Australian English. He says :

...the body of Indian-English writings has grown.... And I believe the 'changeling' has enough vitality in it to communicate the feeling of dynamic growth, both in technical expression and content.⁵

The initiative taken by Mulk Raj Anand in the thirties has been consolidated by his successors such as Kamala Das, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Arun Joshi and others. Kamala Das, in particular writes in one of her poems entitled 'introduction' :

The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't you see?⁶

The use of English in India spanning more than a century has developed a distinct variety of English 'intelligible internally as

well as internationally, the national identity of its own.⁷ Indian English has now become almost a language which has been 'enriched by the cadences of Sanskrit and a large number of words, idioms and expressions from regional languages. No one who has made a study of Indian English can fail to observe its composite nature.'⁸ The following conclusion made by the above scholar may provide anyone a clue for analysing the linguistic influence on a particular author :

First, English becomes more and more capable of meeting the demands of the Indian socio-cultural context through large-scale borrowing of words, idioms and expressions from Indian languages.... Further, loan words in English are made to yield hybrid formations, compounds and collocations.... Secondly, creativeness in the use of Indian English is achieved by enriching its resources by exploiting the internal contrasts both above and below the central point of the cline of bilingualism.⁹

Arun Joshi uses almost all the linguistic devices referred to in the above quotation. However, the recurrence varies from novel to novel. *The Foreigner* was begun in America and completed in India. In this novel there are only two Hindi words namely *Seithji* (211) and *Namaste* (235). This novel deals with the American life and characters or with the America-based Indian characters. It is perhaps for this reason that Arun Joshi avoided using words from Hindi or other regional languages, while he has done so in other novels. Joshi's second novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* contains a large number of Indian words interlarded with English speech. Most of these are words related to the Indian environment and the translation of these into English would be cumbersome. Some of these words such as Paan (28), Yajna (52), Jaimala (62), Aarti (97), Mahaprasad (112), Bidi (118), Pugree (154), Panchayat (184) etc. In *The Apprentice* some of the Indian words used are inquilab (12), Sarson (18), Lassi (27), Tum Tum (29), Mantra (34), Pujari (121), Janeyu (123), Gayatri (146) etc. The use of words borrowed from the Indian languages continues in *The Last Labyrinth* and *The City and the River*.

Most of these words cannot be called Indian loan words in English for most of them have not been included in the dictionaries of current and contemporary English. Some of these could easily have been replaced with their standard English equivalents. But Arun Joshi has avoided this for the sake of creating verisimilitude in the Indian context. A *banjara* conveys more than gypsy in the Indian context as does *gunia* against exorcist. Sometimes the English equivalent is given within parentheses.

Arun Joshi is fond of using collocations and compounds on the model of the Indian languages such as 'modesty act' (*The Foreigner*, p. 111), 'advice-giving season' (*Ibid.*, 140), 'foreign-returned chaps' (*Ibid.*, 141), 'hurt-dog-like eyes' (*Ibid.*, 153). In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* some of the following expressions are used such as 'star-constellations' (8), 'honey-mooning couples' (36), 'song-writer uncle' (64), 'cow-dust hour' (99), 'hairy-fairy academic' (138), 'sun-down' (195). In *The Apprentice* some of the following compounds and collocations are based on those in Indian languages 'Butcher-Police' (12), 'betel-spit' (13), 'right-hand man' (22), 'cot-farewell stage' (25), 'Tea-man' (60) etc. In *The Last Labyrinth* the expressions such as 'mate-selection' (67), 'money-man' (84), 'peacock-carpet' (168), 'the mountain-road' (177) etc. are a few examples of collocations on the Indian model. In *The City and the River* 'brick-colonies' (12), 'mud-colonies' (20), 'brick-people' (20) and 'asthough-attitude' (38) are a few examples of collocations on the Indian model. Some of the expressions combine both Hindi and English expressions such as 'vilayati stuff' (114) and 'vilayati-blood' (114) in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* and 'Paan-red lips' (29) and 'ash-smeared sadhus' from *The Last Labyrinth*.

Many of these compounds and collocations reveal a tendency in Indian English towards pre-modification rather than post-modification. 'An act of modesty' becomes 'modesty act' (111) and 'women working in stone', 'stone-women' (147) in *The Foreigner*. Some of these compounds have instances of

conversion as a conjunction : 'asthough' is converted into Adjective in 'asthough-attitude', referred to above.

Arun Joshi is fond of translating Hindi sentences literally into English. The following is an instance of a characteristic Indian utterance in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* :

'What happened to my expedition!' he exclaimed.

'Ask me what did *not* happen to it.' (66)

Dhunia, a tribal, requests the District Collector, 'you are our mother and father' (*Ibid.*, 155). Such literal translations from Hindi are found almost in all the novels of Arun Joshi.

Besides translating Hindi sentences into English Joshi also transliterates Hindi sentences in Roman alphabet giving their English equivalents within parentheses. Most of such utterances are found there in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* :

- (a) 'mat'i ke putle' (163), (b) 'sone ka dil' (227),
(c) 'pagal mat bano' (228), (d) 'bal nahin banka hoga' (230).

These transliterations with their translations have their own earthiness because of their being rooted in the Indian soil.

Joshi's Indian psyche makes him feel, think and write as a typical Indian. He recreates the Indian situation of a traditional wife lamenting on the dead body of her dead husband. Bilasia, the tribal girl, screams and cries seeing the dead body of Billy, her husband, as most of the Indian women do in similar situations :

She waited for us in her hut. She had undone her hair and thrown away her bangles. She was entirely composed until she saw Billy's body. Then she let out a wail that was more like the roar of an enraged gale than the cry of mortal men. 'I told you not to go', she waited, 'I told you not to go'.¹⁰

What Meenakshi Mukherjee comments on Mulk Raj Anand's use of language is also applicable to Arun Joshi's use of English :

His endeavour to naturalize the English language depends on three devices. Most notable is the literal translation of

Hindi or Punjabi idioms into English : thus, 'my counterfeit luck' (mere khota naseeb), 'is this any talk?' (Yeh bhi koi bat hai), 'nothing black in the pulse' (dal me kala), 'made my sleep illegal' (neend haram kar di). Secondly, he interpolates Hindi words in an English sentence indiscriminately, sometimes as nouns ('shut up saley, stop your *tain*, *tain*' or 'These angrez *log* are crafty'), sometimes more daringly in verbs ('*sisking*' or '*burbarred*'). The third device is changing the spelling of English words to suggest uneducated speech : 'yus' for us, 'notus' for notice, 'poolc' for police, 'Girman'y' and 'Amrika' for Germany and America. The third device is patently false, because an Indian writer writing in English *prima facie* accepts the unreality of the characters speaking in English, since the characters would not do so in real life. Since it is understood that their speech is being recreated in another language, distorting the spelling of English words contributes nothing to the effect of verisimilitude. Even the device of interpolating Hindi words seems to be an unfair short-cut towards the solution of a problem that is essentially complex.¹¹

All the devices except the last one, that is, spelling English words in the Indian way, has been used in Arun Joshi's fiction. Joshi's characters are mostly educated in Britain and the U.S.A. Joshi convinces us that his characters talk in English. Sheila in *The Foreigner* did not want Babu to marry an American girl because of the language problem. To this Sindi replies :

'We all know English; don't we? I asked.
'Even now we are speaking English;
are n't we?'¹²

But this is hardly true in the case of tribals in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* and the boatmen in *The City and the River*. In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* Meena Chatterjee 'talked almost entirely in English in that unique, rather flat, accent that is to be found in young ladies taught in convents.'¹³

III

The linguistic influence upon the fiction of Arun Joshi is in the various fields of English language such as vocabulary, syntax

and usage. English is the native language of the U.K. It has spread as a first language in the U.S.A. and as a second language in India. The British English transplanted in America and India in the 17th century has subsequently been coloured by the local cultures and thinking and as such 'English language in America and India has undergone the process of Americanization and Indianization respectively'.¹⁴ Joshi's use of British English is modified by his use of Americanisms and Indianisms. Americanisms and Indianisms are in their turn, coloured by their local cultures and ways of thinking. In the case of Indian English, there are loan words from Indian languages, translation of words and expressions from Indian languages, hybridized expressions and new coinages. Joshi's idiom is guided by the Indian psyche. His characters think and feel in English but the idea is typically Indian on many occasions. He gives English clothes to Indian way of thinking.

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15

Anti-Feminism in Shobha De : A Study of the Women Characters in *Starry Nights*

—Nivedita Maitra

THE TERM Feminism has been in vogue for about a century now. Various persons have defined Feminism in various ways. For some "Feminism is an expression of resentment at the unjust treatment meted out to women,"¹ to others it is the voice of dissent of the women to be treated as a door mat or a piece of furniture meant for the convenience of man.² To still others it is the refusal to accept the set of values, moral codes and social norms made by the male dominated society.

To understand feminism it is important to know those facts which the feminists termed as Anti-Feministic and sought to oppose vehemently.

The Anti-Feminists were of the opinion that there were fundamental differences between men and women based on the difference between the male nature and the female nature.

The most important difference was in the field of sexuality. A man felt strong sexual stimulation from time to time. Whereas the sexual experiences of a woman were dominated by her maternal instinct. The fundamental qualities of a woman's nature all revolved around the fact that she was some day to become a mother.³

The Anti-Feminists also viewed the difference between the brain weight and brain function of men and women as biological

evidence of a fundamental difference between the sexes. The average brain weight of a man was said to be 100 to 200 grams greater than that of a woman. Certain sinuations of the male brain were thought to be heavier than those of the female brain. Thus the conclusion was drawn that women had more limited or at any rate — different intellectual capacities than had men.⁴

According to the anti-feministic view, psychological qualities were rooted in physical properties. The ability to give birth to children and the lighter weight of the brain left indelible marks upon the character of a woman. The core of the female psyche consisted on the one hand of her high and varied emotional life and on the other hand of her restricted and simple mental life. A woman was thus less egotistical and more capable of making personal sacrifices.

Thus within the framework of these views a very clear distinction between Feminine and Masculine qualities were drawn.

Men were superior in those capacities and qualities that were decisively important to a person's success in the public sphere; intelligence, courage, perseverance and discipline.

For women Marriage is the event in her life, the only great turning point, when she truly emerges as a complete woman.⁵

A woman would be deeply unhappy if she did not reach her "Natural Destination". But for men the matters were quite different. There were things that he lost when he got married, his spiritual freedom and independent judgment.

The concept of an Ideal Woman for the anti-feminists was, "an extremely sensitive and maternal type of person, who devoted her life to caring for her husband and children, while she herself remained in the background. She knew her place. She acknowledged her husband as her superior. She was happy to obey and follow him".⁶ In this connection Jan Romein has referred to "the idol under the bell jar".⁷ The bell jar can be taken to be a symbol of the constraint imposed by the norms of respectability that a woman had to adhere to in order to remain

attractive to man. [Strangely enough they never referred to the need of love and friendship in man-woman relationship.] These were the spheres in which the feminists worked and opposed the set notions of the antifeminists.⁸

The Gender distinction which resembles a system of subordination and hierarchization with women at the bottom and men at the top provides a fertile ground for male violence against women.⁹ Gender based violence against women crosses all cultural, religious and regional boundaries and creates a major problem in every country in which it has been studied. In 1989 the World Watch Institute declared that the most common crime world-wide was violence against women with violence affecting at two levels : Private and Public.¹⁰ Violence against women in private sphere includes abuse by a spouse or other male partners at home. World wide studies indicate that between 20 and 50 per cent of women suffer abuse by a man with whom they are or were intimate.¹¹

The Feminist too accepted the fact that women were quite different from men but the difference between men and women was in physical strength, in some vital functions, disposition and personality traits.¹² Feminists accepted the essential feminine traits i.e., that women were intuitive, emotional and maternal, and these traits were present at birth and were fixed and unchangeable. The female personality imbued with the emotions of day to day life, was down to earth.¹³ But Feminists did not believe in the intellectual inferiority of women. Instead, the inferiority was believed to be due to her upbringing and roles of doll, mummy and/or housekeeper once she was married.¹⁴ To the Feminist the Ideal Woman was one whose mental horizon had broadened and who was interested in more than her family, a woman who was capable of bearing social responsibility and who could independently arrive at her own opinion.¹⁵ The rationalistic view was that she was a woman who had developed into a human being in the very highest sense of the word, a woman who had had the opportunity to develop her general human capacities rather than her feminine ones.

II

It is within these parameters of Feminist and Anti-Feminist views that I have tried to analyse all the characters of Shobha De's *Starry Nights* especially the women characters and have found that though Shobha De may have been labelled variously as "The High Priestess of Gossip and Innuendo",¹⁶ "Bodice ripper",¹⁷ "The Soft Porn Star", yet behind all this facade of bold expositions of sex and women's lib she is basically an anti-feminist who does not let her women characters develop general human capabilities. The real underlying theme of *Starry Nights* is the gender bias, subordination of women, male-violence and the social taboos on woman which the woman herself unknowingly inflicts upon herself because of the prevalent social norms, and, as a result lead an unhappy life as she gets trapped within the set moral codes and social norms of the society meant only for women. Shobha De through some of her women characters like Malini and Rita has been able to portray a very vivid picture of the inequality between men and women which is prevalent in the society even today.

In the character of Malini we find the story of hundreds of such women who sign their death-warrant the day they give up their career in preference for marriage. When a man marries he does not have to sacrifice his career but when a woman marries the first condition of the 'marriage contract' is the giving up of her career and this act then enslaves her for the rest of her life because she then lacks the economic independence. She is left with no choice but to put up with all the whims and fancies of her husband.

He (Akshay) was incapable of understanding her sensitive and artistic nature. He mocked her religion, he scoffed at her music, and he loathed her. For what? For giving up her career? for docilely agreeing to his every whim and providing him with a home he could be proud of. For sacrificing, yes sacrificing everything to be Mrs. Arora (*Starry Nights*, p. 51).

Malini is an educated woman with a good cultural background.

She is a gazal singer and is just getting recognition as a gazal singer when Akshay Arora the leading star of the film world proposes to her. She consents to marry Akshay knowing fully well that he has chosen her to be his wife not because he loves her but because he wants a 'home-maker' "Some one who will be a good mother to his children".

"I don't want to marry a painted doll, some cheap film girl who will flirt with all my friends. Malini is the right woman for me" (p. 40).

Malini was aware that Akshay had chosen her to be his wife after much deliberation. It was obvious he wasn't looking for a glamour girl or an intellectual. He just wanted a 'home-maker' and 'mother to his children' (p. 40).

Akshay does not want a life companion who can share all his joys and sorrows, who can be his partner intellectually and lend psychological support but just a good mother to his children. This gender bias has been beautifully brought forth by Shobha De. The underlying secondary position of women has been subtly hidden under the cover of pornography.

Akshay does not help Malini to become a star, on the contrary on the day of their wedding according to the contract, Malini announces to the press her decision to quit her career. "My husband means more to me than a career. I believe a wife's place is in the home, not in a recording studio. Akshay is an old fashioned man. I will never displease him" (p. 40).

III

The general attitude of the women to mould themselves into the 'Ideal woman' image (as visualized by the Anti-Feminists) proves suicidal for them. Malini is unhappy, desolate, depressed, insecure. She needs to talk to someone, 'someone decent and respectable, someone who understood wayward husband'... (p. 43).

Shobha De in her own style has been able to expose the double standards prevalent in the society. On the one hand she has the male chauvinist Akshay who demands total devotion and

faithfulness from his wife but himself indulges freely in not one but innumerable extra-marital affairs.

“Everyone in the industry knew, however that on the night before the wedding itself.... Akshay, sloshed senseless, had driven straight to the house of Silk-Simki and stayed there. Even before their honeymoon was over Akshay had betrayed her trust at least half a dozen times. He was an indiscriminate womanizer. And a champion hypocrite (p. 40).

Malini knew about all Akshay's liaisons and had often watched him flirting with his heroines but like a good wife never threw tantrums nor got hysterical, instead converted herself into the film industry's 'bhabhiji'.

‘For her part Malini liked the image and cultivated it assiduously. Soon, it got her appearance as well. She began wearing expensive, dully-dignified saris and pulling her luxuriant hair back into a no-nonsense bun. Strictly no make-up apart from a smudge of kajal and no sparkle in the eyes either. Her singing came to a full stop as per the pre-marriage contract and the only time she permitted herself the luxury of a song was when she sang her morning bhajan while performing her daily puja in the elaborate pujaghar. In quick succession Malini produced two sons’ (p. 41).

Malini completely lost her identity and her individuality. She fits into every aspect of the Ideal Woman image of the anti-feminists view. Shobha De makes Rita her mouthpiece in this novel.

Rita is the wife of a rich film producer, Kailash who is equally unfaithful to Rita as Akshay to Malini. But Rita too does not protest instead considers herself lucky that she doesn't get beaten up and is allowed to spend as much money as she wants. She tells Malini after Malini has a showdown with Aasha Rani.

“Look at it this way, sweetie”, crooned Rita, “you have his name. You live well. He is good to you — I mean, there is no violence in your marriage. Akshayji doesn't beat you or anything. What more do you expect? Romance finishes the

morning after the wedding night. After that what ? Boredom. Men like variety. We women have to put up with that and switch our minds to something else. Why don't you play rummy. It's relaxing. It will take your mind off all this. Of course at this stage you hate Akshayji. That's normal. In any case most women hate their husbands, it's a fact. They hate marriage. That's also a fact. But what else can they do? What is the choice? (p. 50)

Rita herself experiences similar fate.

Suddenly Malini became aware that Rita had been nattering on about her sex life. "Of course sweetie, it hasn't been easy being married to Kailashji. You know, he's a very demanding man in every way — and so much temptation. Arrey every day he has beautiful women falling at his feet, begging him to them into his bed. But I told him from day one. 'Look here, ji, I am your wife. You give me proper respect. I don't want to know about your 'lafdas'. If you have any affair, just be sensible and don't let me know or find out. In public, you have to give me the honour I deserve. What you do behind my back does not concern me'... I have my friends, my works, my shopping, my kitty parties, my foreign holidays, what more does a woman want?" (p. 47).

There is no protest from the women's side. Neither Rita nor Malini protest at the infidelity of their husbands. They, just shut their eyes and do not want to know about their husband's 'lafdas'. They are happy shopping diamond jewellery and attending Kitty parties.

They are thus very superficial characters who cannot even stand up for their basic human rights.

IV

Marriage, to the anti-feminists, is a prerogative. An unmarried woman is always looked down upon. Shobha De does not miss this aspect of anti-feminism either. She puts these words in the mouth of Malni. She curses Aasha Rani for trying to steal her husband from her :

"My curse is upon you. You will never be happy. You will never marry. You will die as you are, without sindoor in your maang. And then, you will remember this day and regret it" (p. 49).

Marriage for women is considered the most important event, the solution to all problems. Tushar, a seasoned hero offers advice to Aasha Rani :

"It (films) is not a place for women. I know so many heroines who used to work with me ten years ago. Where are they today? No roles, no friends, no money. The lucky ones are those who escaped in time. Got married. Left this wretched industry and never looked back. That is what you should do. Find a good man, settle down, have children, forget all this (p. 99).

For women, marriage is considered the ultimate goal. For them the life's mission is finding a husband and bearing his children. For them life holds no other promise, there is nothing to look forward, nothing to achieve. Malini, Rita and even Aasha Rani fall into this category. Marriage becomes an obsession with Aasha Rani. Marriage with any one, first it was Akshay with whom she fancied being in love, but when he refused to marry her then it was Abhijit with whom she ran off to New Zealand. Abhijit's father got the news, met them at the Auckland airport and brought back his son with him leaving Aasha Rani all alone and all to herself in a foreign land. She travelled to Wellington and there she met Jay. Jay proposed to her and she readily agreed to marry him. Very soon she became a mother of a beautiful daughter, Sasha. She readily gave up career and was content being a wife and mother performing all the routine duties like cooking and house-keeping.

Another important aspect of the novel are the male characters. All the male characters are rich, influential occupying higher positions in the society. Seth Amirchand is a Member of Parliament, a politician outwardly but inwardly an underworld don dealing with drugs and gold. Akshay Arora is the leading male star. Suhas is the director of art films, 'arty-intellectual type'. Abhijit was the worthy scion of the Mehra empire. He had

his education at Eton, then at Cambridge where he read economics and then he went to Harvard for his post-graduate degree in business management. None of the women characters are influential, rich or in high positions of the society. They are all mere puppets in the hands of the men who treat them in whatever manner they desire. All the men in *Starry Nights* indulge in all kinds of immoral activities but are neither condemned nor punished for their acts, on the contrary they are almost worshipped, respected and loved. They treat women not with respect but consider them as objects of pleasure and Shoba De lets her women characters willingly get exploited and used by men to satisfy their insatiable hunger for sex. This willing submission on their part makes them very cheap characters. They are neither the innocent victims of the immoral society as Hardy's Tess nor the unflinching, unyielding fiery woman 'Subernalata' of Aasha Purna Debi's *Subernalata* where the reader feels a deep sense of compassion for the former and bows his head in respect for the latter.

V

Shobha De makes no pretense in presenting women in *Starry Nights* in their most degradable low levels. The women she chooses to present belong to that tinsel town where everything is silvery yet their personal lives are full of dark crevices and gloomy corridors. All the women characters are at such low levels that it makes the reader wonder why a woman writer makes the women characters of her novel deplorable, hypocrites, immoral, spiteful and shallow.

In no single character has Shobha De infused the spirit of dignity and self-respect or endowed them with intellectual insight.

No character is worthy of sympathy, compassion or admiration. All that the reader is left with, on reading *Starry Nights*, is disgust. Shri A.G. Khan in his article Shobha De 'Vatsyayani' asked a very pertinent question to Shobha De, 'Whose side are you, by the way'?

I would say Shobha De belongs to side of the Anti-feminists. She does not want her women characters to be self-respecting, dignified or persons with integrity. There is no widening of their mental horizon. They learn nothing from life, nor do they set examples for the other women for a better tomorrow.

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16

Boman Desai's *Asylum, USA* : A Critique

—R.S. Pathak

BOMAN DESAI'S first novel, *The Memory of Elephants* (1992), was hailed as a "fascinating kaleidoscope of collective and family history" and an honest account of "the strengths and eccentricities of the Parsis".¹ It is through the protagonist, Hormus Seervai, and through his invention of 'memoscan' that the novelist brings together the entire history of the Parsi exodus and their way of life. It gives Homi "the power to probe the memory of elephants...to discover no less than the equation of the universe which Einstein had sought".² Desai's recent novel called *Asylum, USA* (2000) is a novel of different quality and denominations. In this novel also memory plays a role but it has got not much to do with the Collective Unconscious of the Parsis. The novelist does refer to the parents of the protagonist briefly, from whom he inherited some of his problems, and to all-knowing astrologer 'Burjor Uncle' always eager to "put two and two together" whom the protagonist dismisses summarily in Shakespeare's words from *Macbeth*, "Be these juggling fiends no more believed" (p. 171). But it is the memory of his 'encounters' with the American youth — particularly women — that occupies the centrestage.

The storyline in *Asylum, USA* is thin and of a rather ephemeral nature. Noshir Daruvala, twenty-three-year old, engineering student, struggling to make both ends meet in Chicago, offers Barbara, a gorgeous redhead, ex-Playboy bunny, all American woman, a thousand dollars to marry him so that he

can become a citizen of the USA and get a green card before he gets deported to Bombay. It is a marriage of convenience, for Barbara has a live-in lover who is a woman. Then Noshir meets Blythe who takes him under her wing, but she has a boyfriend, Lex. And so the life of the protagonist moves on to Brij and Sheila and Lisa and Sally and so on. Noshir, ultimately, does get a green card but does he find love and happiness? The narrative, occasionally interspersed with interesting comments, queer experiences and any misadventures, is characterised by poignance and gravity and hilarious escapades.

Matthew Arnold calls literature "a criticism of life". *Asylum, USA* is a realistic portrayal of the ethos obtaining in America in the sixties. Young men and women opt for "open marriages" and live-in arrangements. Institutionalised adolescence, physical entanglements, free sex, lesbianism, nudism, craze for freedom (or licence?) are a way of life with them. There are also mentions of the introduction of television and the failed three-language formula in India (pp. 266-67) which help us locate the text in the sixties. The Parsis led a happy life in India before the Partition. During the British rule, the Parsis, we are informed, "thought they were like British only, ruling India side by side".⁴ In the post-Independence India, however, they developed the feeling of being turned into "second class citizens".⁵ Regarding the Parsis' sense of loss, Gustad Noble says in *Such a Long Journey* :

No future for minorities, with all this Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people of America — twice as good as the white man to get half as much.⁶

The renaming of the streets threatens them with the effacement of their own identity. One of them asks in the same novel : "Will I get a second chance to live it all again, with these new names? ...What happens to my life — Rubbed out, just like that?"⁷ The nationalization of banks appeared to seal off their future, and they had no option but to leave for the West in search of fresh fields and new pastures. The craze for a foreign degree was primarily responsible for looking Westward on the part of the

young Parsis like Noshir. They are exhorted : "One day, you must go, too, to America. No future here",⁸ although they find it governed by values somewhat different from theirs.

The sixties in the American context are presented by Desai as "a difficult time" (p. 147) in which "Everyone won some battles; but everyone lost the war" (p. 132). What makes matters worse is that very few of the young people would "escape from the inexorable force of time" (p. 262). Earlier it was everyone's business whom one lived with but now "Everything was permitted" (p. 37). People were free "to enjoy everything... beholden to no one, responsible only" to themselves (p. 46). "They'll try anything" (p. 267) and "were comfortable enough with" [their] bodies, and bodily functions" (p. 107). A young woman "maintained her independence, keeping her maiden name, and [her] circle of friends" although she would not do anything necessarily "contrived, mercenary, or Machiavellian". She would merely follow "the way of the world" which ensured the "survival of the fittest" (p. 256). She would live her life with "dashes instead of periods" (p. 245). It was their life and the young would not brook and interference; they would go by trials-and-errors. As the novelist tells us, "Some learned a hundred lessons from one mistake, others nothing from a hundred, still others made the same mistake a hundred times" (p. 261).

Love is often regarded as a significant propeller in the life of young people. Love, says Byron, may be of man's life a thing apart, but it is woman's whole existence. But thanks to the Great Love Experiment begun in the sixties, people were eager to join it, though "eager to be as cool as everyone else", and the greater the number of exlovers the greater one's "desirability" and the "prouder" the person (p. 91). Towards the end of the novel, the realisation dawns on the protagonist that 'a lover's rise is shorter than his fall' (p. 221). As for the society, "All the world loves a lover but few love to listen to him at length" (p. 199). Marriage proper is a rare thing in this world. Many people would be unhappy if they tried it, for "they couldn't afford the wedding of their dreams" (p. 37). In general, they would prefer "the

adventure of the world" (p. 215). Divorces, their number going up daily, would "cost less than the marriage" (p. 269). Consequently, some people would live "separately to save their marriage. Too many others they know who'd married were divorced" (p. 160).

The novelist holds the sociological climate and absence of commitment and traditional values responsible for this state of affairs, which results in what he calls the Disneyland Syndrome :

...a different sociological climate might have fructified into a brave new world, but which the Disneyland people...disallowed. The infrastructure of Disneyland was too powerful, it allowed no differences, and it instilled shame, sorrow, loneliness among those who differed, but once you'd embraced the infrastructure you were welcomed back like the prodigal son as if the formal hypocrisies of law, religion, and socialization were any less onerous (p. 114).

Commitment and traditional values, the novelist feels, may provide a panacea for the ills because "the values remain constant" and "are at their most valuable when at their least fashionable". He adds nevertheless that even traditional families fall apart for 'a lack of love' (p. 115). The values are replaced by betrayal, duplicity, jealousy, pretension and hypocrisy, although what is needed most is responsibility, understanding and genuine concern.

The novel contains some interesting observations on beauty, truth, good, life, happiness and racism also. In the course of his narrative, the novelist has shed pertinent light on women's position and plight in the most advanced country in the world. The epigraph of the novel taken from Lannon and maintaining that "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans", sums up the novelist's attitude. The condition of women in this society are far from satisfactory. One of the main reasons for their dismal condition is discrimination perpetuated against them in the society. Owing to chauvinism, they are given less than what they deserve. We are told : "You wouldn't believe

the incompetence of some of the men working there, but they won't give any of the top jobs to women no matter how competent they are" (p. 108). The rules are constantly bent to harm women's interests. "The battle of the sexes," comments the protagonist, "is a gruelling, bruising, unfair game, the rules of which you learn so you can break them to your advantage" (p. 260). In this battle women emerge worse off.

The novelist presents his women characters as victims of their circumstances. Barbara, for example, "wore her gayness like a badge" and almost invariably appeared as "grimfaced, scowlmouthed, steeleyed" (p. 48). The root cause of her problems lay in her parents' strained relations, her mother's premature death, for which she held her "wifebeating" father responsible, and "her lover doing a bunk for whom she'd aborted the thickening in her belly" (pp. 273-74). Her lesbian partner, Carmie, herself "a casualty of love", was "as expedience" for her but not her "soulmate" (p. 80). Carmie had been raped at the age of fifteen in Puerto Rico, had a child who lived with Carmie's mother, and sent money to her mother for their subsistence (pp. 48-49). Carmie's love for Barbara was more tender than sexual, for "they both needed tenderness more than sex" (p. 49). Then we have Blythe who lost her father when she was still a child and was subjected to regular beatings, like her mother, by her stepfather. Her boyfriend, Lex, put her "through hoops" and she learned from him "to put subsequent lovers through hoops". In fact, she needed people "who needed her" to "stay in control" (p. 147). Sheila Waggoner married her high school science teacher, thirty years older than her, who sired three children, but after that "he'd despaired that he was too old to satisfy her and lined up his friends to sleep with her on weekends" (p. 137). She went back to her husband for the sake of her beautiful kids. Finally, Lisa whose mother dies when she was just nine, is doomed to tolerate her "racy" third stepmother. Her father's "serial wives" disappeared on him one by one and Lisa had to nurture him and her brothers — "play mommy" for them — instead of being herself nurtured. This created a void — a hole

"big as Jupiter" — which she tried to fill "bartering sex for affection" (p. 229). She loved Noshir but had to leave him for Jim who could provide her "money, shelter, protection, security" (p. 255). Placed in more favourable circumstances, these women would have most probably behaved in a different way.

It is not surprising that in such an environment not one character evolves properly. Except perhaps Noshir, who has autobiographical traces about him, no character has been conceived adequately and convincingly. They fail to relate to each other except physically. Their sexuality, however, is neither Lawrentian nor has any real affinity with that of Henry Miller or Philip Roth. The protagonist is unheroic and possesses anti-hero-like characteristics. He makes a fool of himself for beautiful women, and even at the age of twenty-two looks "parched like a doset, empty like space" (p. 126). Initially, he suffers from Victorian inhibitions, but later whenever the notions of propriety, responsibility and honour cross his mind, he shrugs them off "as outmoded, Victorian, stupid" (p. 252). His love for Lisa is the most important part of his life. He wanted the kind of love she had once given him "unrestrainedly, however imprudent, illicit, illusory, [and] momentary" (p. 254), but this was not to be. She seized his heart "as lethally as a martial artist" (p. 206) but this "beautiful relationship" underwent "a beautiful ending" (p. 236). The protagonist himself is painfully aware of his limitations.

As a postmodernist novel, *Asylum, USA* does not aim at conveying any message or philosophy. Nor would the novelist bully his readers to accept his vision of life and solutions to its ills. He nevertheless has his own views about the problems of the world and what the individual can do to minimize its problems. Ego hassels are senseless since, he says, nothing persists in stasis. It is incumbent upon each person to get rid of deceptions and 'discover and use our individual gifts' (p. 258). There are, however, people 'who make God contingent upon their own happiness' and regard themselves as 'the center of the world' (p. 264). Love and understanding can go a long way in solving many problems. There is no sense, says the novelist, in piercing

the thorax of truth. "Paradoxically," he adds, "it [the world] is perfect because it needs improvement; if it needed no improvement it would be dead.... It is subtlety, not certainty, that makes the truth beautiful" (p. 249). All people suffer in life but the sense of fellowfeeling can make life bearable. "We are all victims to a degree," the novelist maintains, "but we are all victors when we recognize our bond. We are not alone and must not behave as if we are" (p. 224). This is a very sensible approach to life, the world and their problems.

Asylum, USA, however, is a remarkable piece of writing in respect of its technique. The novel puts forth Desai's theory of writing. The novelist has used the metaphor of the way he rides his Volkswagen, to present his story. It is an ingenious, albeit somewhat over-stretched, device. The story starts (ignition), picks up speed slowly (gears one to four) through situations and other passengers, and finally comes crashing to a halt, screeching when a relationship flounders, or taking a U turn when an aborted relationship is renewed. In his casual way the novelist has highlighted some important aspects of his narrative. "I cannot tell the whole story all at once," he says (p. 1). In fact, the novel comprises certain shorter stories inside a bigger story. The novelist himself mentions the Immigration Story, Marriage Story, Life in India Stories, and so on (p. 183). "...the shorter story jumpstarts the longer, the longer is a variation of the shorter; some themes overlap, and other themes develop differently" (p. 105). He is also not unaware of the "roadblocks to the form" of his narrative; to circumvent them he would try to opt for "the fluid freeway through case, tense, person, voice, among other syntactical hurdles" (p. 274). The novelist claims to have given "the illusion of nonfiction". He would not approve of proliferation of "the fast food writers" who would try to "whip the narrative ahead" with one idea or circumstance or character (p. 67). We got in the novel a replay of the stories within a story which we come across in ancient Indian fictional works.

The novelist claims to "have the measure" of his story. He further says : "...writing a novel is like building blocks, the more

widely you build the foundation the more confidentially you ascend rarefied heights". A novel, he adds, may alternatively be compared to "a rocket, propelled by the sections left behind" (p. 164). "Or, is it just masturbation?", he asks (p. 67). He wanted to make his stories free from personal sentimentalised intrusion — "a record without regret, a memoir with a smile" (p. 179), but what turns out at the end is "the wringing of the heartcloth" (p. 105). The relationship between the main story and the subplots is so involved that at times he has no choice but to "telegraph, paraphrase, give the gist" (p. 102) if only to maintain continuity and order in the narrative.

Most of the characters, as said earlier, are hardly better than wax dolls. But the novelist tries to differentiate them from each other with the help of deft strokes. The one-line remarks about them will enable us to spot them out without much trouble in a big crowd. For example, we have the "gorgeous" Barbara, voluptuous but always looking stern with her high cheekbones and hollowing cheeks, vermilion red hair and ultraviolet colour (pp. 3-4). Brij is just sixteen with blond hair in the Marilyn Monroe style, skin like gold paint, plush limbs pouring from cutoffs and a Keep On Trucking teeshirt, more rounded for her age. Carrie appears stern with her mouth like a thin straight-line and limbs sleek and brown from tennis and the sun. Sally's is a "wraithlike" presence. And Lisa, a white skinny bony girl, has the flushed, scrubbed look of a child.

The novel is generally in the first person narrative style. But the novelist does not fail to see "the perils of writing in first person" (p. 97). Only occasionally — in fact, very rarely — some other character is allowed to interpose the flow of the story. For example, Blythe claims to be "pushing" Noshir out of the car, for "He's been driving too long", adding that she is obliged to do so if only to provide "a different perspective" to the story, although she knows well that she is "no more a writer than he is" (p. 121). The novelist would do everything possible to maintain the verisimilitude and authenticity. He gives the impression of telling a true story, reminding his readers at the

same time that "no parallel to any living person or incident is either intended or to be inferred, and that all names have been changed to protect the guilty" (p. 106). Reality, as the novelist seems to suggest, is a matter of perspective. For the sake of verisimilitude, he admits to have proved himself "many times a liar" having "lied about facts, mixed them with fiction". Outlining his theory of truth in a fictional work, he says :

...if enough facts are turned to fiction the fictional appears factual, and the heart of a story, pumping its blood into its readers, appears more true than its model; truth becomes fiction, fiction truth — and while truth may be stranger than fiction, fiction can appear truer than truth (p. 241).

He further says : "Lies can be closer to truth than facts; truth, too narrowly defined, becomes a more subtle life" (p. 242). These 'lies' may be due to acts of omission and commission. In the process, memory also plays a significant role — memory which sifts truth for fictional use. "Truth," we are reminded, "is the maidservant of memory" (p. 4). This view is very close to that of Rushdie who writes in *Midnight's Children* :

Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems — but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible. ...tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves — or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself *is* reality.⁹

Desai's presentation of the social reality of the particular period affecting Americans' thinking and way of life has got to be analysed keeping this theory in mind. His characters are the products of the social ethos and their thinking is governed by what they do and feel.

Desai's style is marked by a rare fluency and felicity. The virtuosity dazzles us, but the style seems to be at times excess of the substance. The novelist plays with the language as a kitten would with a mouse. He writes of "the tremors of amor" (p. 185) and the "bedmanners [which] had been badmanners

enough" (p. 129). The following verbal encounter between Lisa and Noshir exemplifies his typical love for word-play :

I hadn't heard from you in so long that I thought that you thought that I didn't care.

You thought that I thought that you thought that I thought. Since when did you to so much thinking? (p. 246).

The repetition adds a new expressiveness and a renewed sense of urgency. Other examples are : "the longer goes wronger" (p. 106); "midlaunch midair" (p. 148); "what do worlds matter when you're lost in the world" (p. 224), and so on. We also have surfeit of details at times. The narrator refers to his heart as "the dark, dirty, bloody, bleeding, meaty, beaty, puppy, pulsing, sticky, stinking, brackish, blackish red, clotted thing" (p. 185). And, to give one more example, the casual wears of Helen, Blythe's friend, comprised "baubles, bangles, bells, bracelets, beads, barrettes, belts, bands" and so on (p. 108). The use of alliteration is not merely a coincidence. More than once words are fused; e.g., *heroworshipped*, *Iloveyous*, *Unconditionallove*, *crossrelationships*, *notyetman*, *stickinthemud*, *singalongs*, *nonracist*, *Makingthebestofit*, *heartcloth*, *Freeandeasy*, *stepdad*, *puppydog*, *mushtalk*, *badmanners*, *wolfman*, *tearstrewn*, *Nono*, *stateofheart*, *antprints*, and so on. This fusion of words may be characteristic of the Speakers' confusion of the speakers' way of life. We also have occasionally italicization and capitalization. All these devices are used extensively in *The God of Small Things* also.

Humour is an integral part of *Asylum, USA*. It contains flashes of Parsis' dry wit. Also the use of irony gives a sweetly pungent taste to the narrative. "Irony," says the narrator, "has more currency than a bully pulpit in the increasingly hardboiled egg of today's globe" (p. 88). The blurb of the novel describes it as a "picaresque and hilarious story". Although it cannot be called a picaresque novel in the strict sense of the term, it is full of self-mockery and its tone is flippant. Even names of some of the characters have a deeper ironical purpose. Blythe, for

example, is not always happy and Barb (short for Barbara) reminds us of barbed wire. Lisa, however, is coquettish as her original, and Riff is symptomatic of the protagonist's unheroic qualities. Even more interesting is the tendency to cite from Shakespeare out of context and in non-serious situations such as : "What's in a name? A rose is a rose is a rose" (p. 9); "More sinned against than sinning" (p. 20); "I screwed my courage to the stickingplace" (p. 28); "If all the world's a stage..." (p. 38); "The fault, dear Brutus, ...is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings..." (p. 55); and its updated version : "the fault, dear passenger, was in myself, not in my stars, that I was an underling" (p. 124); and "let Rome in Tiber melt" (p. 164), which is most likely to evoke laughter or a missed smile in the new context.

The novelist has used in *Asylum, USA* felicitous phrases such as "victimless strategies", "grief wizening one's face", and so on. Some new words coined by him are : *twentyish*, *tinnabulations*, *butch* (as a noun), *smucks*, *heartcloth*, *understandingness*, *troubledness*, etc. He has created a highly expressive verb in *preechoed*. Sometimes words are given different spellings : "If you are Shyore [sure] I'm Shakespeare" [sexpure] (p. 220). Even slangs are not ruled out : "he felt shit upon" (p. 216). The use of proverbs makes the expression more spicy as in : "lightening didn't strike the same place twice" (p. 143), and "What was the sauce for the goose appeared not to be sauce for the gander" (p. 144). Equally expressive device used by the novelist is his imagery. Some of the apt images used in the novel are given below : "Recreminations followed as plentifully as cockroaches in the tropics" (p. 104); Lisa's constant and quiet smile is like a crescent (p. 189); the surface of the lake "rose and fell like the belly of a sleeping seabeast" (p. 253); to Lisa Noshir's beard is "Like a bird's nest... so earthy" (p. 190); Riff is "curled like a question mark on the floor" (p. 225); Helen's hair is "always wild like a hurricane around her head" (p. 108); Lisa "radiated rainbows" (p. 246) although she and Riff had become "just two ships passing in the nite (p. 245). The use of such images imparts a poetic touch to Desai's language.

Thus *Asylum, USA* by Boman Desai is a worthwhile addition to Indian English fictional literature. In terms of content, it may seem to be regressive in the sense that it does not take serious issues for treatment as does his *The Memory of Elephants*. On account of the flippant tone of *Asylum*, the reader is likely to pay less attention even to sensible observations made by the novelist, and obviously there is no philosophy of life blatantly articulated in its pages, the novelist relying more on what remains half-said or unsaid. But in terms of its fictional narrative and freewheeling structure and felicitous language and powerful style, the novel, notwithstanding its limitations, deserves to be read and evaluated from as many angles as possible.

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17

All for Gold and Sex : A Thematic Analysis of Basavaraj Naikar's Short Stories*

—*Pashupati Jha and T. Ravichandran*

THERE HAS been a trend in the Indian English Writing for the last few decades among a few senior academics that after years of slogging through classics in the classroom, they assume a different role by turning themselves into creative writers. Although scholarship and creativity do not always go hand in hand, there are a few successful scholar writers in India. Basavaraj Naikar has made a humble entry to this exclusive club of professor transformed into a creative writer by way of publishing his first collection, *The Thief of Nagarahalli and Other Stories*. That Basavaraj Naikar has chosen to write in largely ignored genre of short stories, while most of his predecessors, be it Srinivasa Iyengar or Shiv K. Kumar, ventured their hands first at poetry, is a laudable one. And that, instead of going for high-brow themes like 'alienation', 'expatriate sensibility', 'exile', 'east-west encounter', 'dislocation of identity', 'search for the authentic voice', etc., the author is unpretentious about the reiteration of simple themes as man's primordial obsession for the possession of opulent wealth and succulent woman, and his subsequent fall from grace, is equally a meritorious one. These are precisely the themes

* *The Thief of Nagarahalli and Other Stories* was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Fiction Prize for the Best First Book from Eurasia in 2000.

around which our mythical pots were boiling and so many of our master craftsmen were weaving their plots. Naikar's *The Thief of Nagarahalli and Other Stories* contains ten short stories. Except for two stories, all the remaining ones deal with the ingenuity, manipulation, and coercion that go before the craving for money and sex, and the disappointment, repentance and retribution that follow the accomplishment and satiation.

Hunt for gold happens to be the main occupation, in the title piece, for the central character, Malla, the notorious thief of Nagarahalli. And hoarding the booty happens to be the favourite pastime of his patron and landlord, Marigouda. Malla's artifice has been depicted to such an extent that one is enrapt and gets carried away by his dexterously played games and that one wishes Malla to succeed always in the way one wishes Milton's Satan, evil though he may be, to triumph over the rival angels. Because Malla, we find like Milton's Satan, has not chosen evil for the sake of evil but that he finds the path of good to be less challenging and very uninspiring. Thus in the words of the author :

He had tried his hand at ploughing, carpentry and masonry and had felt *utterly disappointed*. That was because those jobs did not *thrill* him. Far from thrilling him, they *deadened his sensibility*. Once he even tried to become a Swami at Ranebennur, but found that it did not suit his bent of mind. At last he was tempted to take to thieving and found it after his heart. He practised that art for a couple of years and made a name for himself. He was so clever in his art that no policeman could lay hands on him even once in his entire thieving career.... The diverse myths built around him speak of his extreme popularity, indeed his notoriety in all the surrounding villages.¹ (emphases added).

While we find a character like Raju in R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, on account of his act of forgery and the laboured repentance, moving from the mundane to the sacred, we see Naikar's Malla shirking off from the sacred for the mundane as

'Once he even tried to become a Swami at Ranebennur, but found that it did not suit his bent of mind!'

There are two engaging and awe-inspiring episodes of Malla's misdeeds described by the author. In the first one, provoked by his patron, the thief ventures to steal the golden ornaments from a dead lady. The job is terribly challenging since the corpse has been always surrounded by the mourning relatives. Undeterred, Malla deftly makes a hole in the wall just behind the dead body is laid. Malla chooses the light moment to insert his hands inside and he collects the dead hands together and makes them clap. The naïve mind of the villagers which conceives that to be the work of the ghost, and the hue and cry that follows provide ample time for Malla to rob off all the ornaments from the dead body. While we laugh at the villagers' folly along with Malla, we also relish the author's dig at the feeble Indian superstitious mind that finds a devil in every dark tree.

The second exploit is equally macabre; this time he has to steal a copper pitcher full of golden ornaments placed before the family god of Desai of the village Annagiri. Malla manages to hide himself skilfully among the oxen brought into the house and finds an easy entry. Then he paralyses the old lady, who keeps an eye over the gold, with fear by showing her his knife. As usual, Malla executes his operation without any hindrance from the owner. Yet, not just satisfied with his loot, and his self-confidence overflowing, while slipping away from the house with the pitcher, he taunts the house-owner by proclaiming his daring act. He shouts, "Dear Desai, I am Malla of Nagarahalli. I have come to tell you that I am taking your pitcher full of gold. You can take it from me if you have the guts" (20). Malla escapes the big chase that follows and before Desai's men reach Nagarahalli, he is fast asleep in his bed. Thus Malla has transformed the mean act of stealing into something sophisticated and superb, thereby winning the admiration of many :

He haunted the imagination of the rich Desais, Patils, Deshpandes and Jahagirdars who spent sleepless nights in contemplation on him. He inspired a heroic spirit in the

hearts of young men. He kindled amorous sentiments in the minds of young girls. Thus "Success" had become another name for Malla. He had taken an oath that he would stop his thieving profession the day he met with failure in his ventures (22).

But he meets his nemesis soon when he gets out-smarted by Monappa. When Malla steals the golden bowl from the landlord of Imrapur and hides it in some ditch to save himself from the police, Monappa steals it away from him. Now there is an open challenge between the two — try how much he can, Malla fails to take back that golden bowl from Monappa. Accepting his defeat, one fine day he disappears from Nagarahalli. Thus ends the glorious career of Malla, the legendary thief. In this manner, as Subhash Chandra comments, "There is a folklorish air about the story...."²

Most of the other stories in this collection too treat the greed for gold as a recurring motif. The next story is even captioned, "All for Gold". In fact, lust for gold and lust *per se* are blended in equal proportions in this story. Virabhadra is hankering after gold and leaves his young wife, Ganga, behind and goes to Bellary on business where he has to delay his stay for many weeks. In the same village, lives Sangappa who has a roving eye for beautiful women. Ganga's 'pretty figure' ensnares and maddens him. He sends his message of love to her through Balappa, who is taken to task by her for this uncalled for errand. Sangappa then bribes an old lady, Paramma, with the 'gift of golden necklace weighing five *tolas*'. Paramma, being an experienced lady in the ways of the world, places the turban of Sangappa in Ganga's house and later manipulates, blackmails and cajoles her into this lustful game. Although Ganga initially thinks, "Sinning once in secrecy would not be a great problem" (46), after yielding to her temptation with the tempter, realises that it could not end as a one-night affair. Naikar here implies that once somebody, even as pure as the mythical Ganga River itself (the choice of the name Ganga is not a mere coincidence) yields to the ways of gold and lust, then there is seldom a comeback. Thus he explains the attitudinal change of Ganga :

Within a month's time they grew up to be expert paramours enjoying their fill of sex without any inhibition. During daytime Ganga would remember her husband who had gone to Bellary on business and feel uneasy for a moment for betraying him, but would soon manage to forget it by recalling Paramma's secret advice about making the best of the golden opportunities of life (50).

Needless to say that "the golden opportunities" in practice meant yielding to the prurient urges of her clandestine admirer, Sangappa!

However in the end, it is again the gold of Virabhadra that ensnares Balappa to betray his loyal friend Sangappa. Balappa lures Sangappa to an isolated place where Virabhadra and his men hack him to death. Gold plays a lot of other roles in the total scheme of Sangappa but finally all his wealth fails to protect him. Though Sangappa commits the deadly sin of coveting his neighbour's wife and deserves to be punished the brutal way in which he gets killed, one cannot but feel some sympathy for him since he has a premonition of his own death and a philosophical outlook towards the ephemeral life. Once in a fair when he happens to see a boy blowing a balloon to its full capacity only to get it burst the next second, he exclaims to his friend Balappa, "See, dear Balya, our life is also like that balloon. We do not know when it bursts" (31).

Rajasekhar, in "Her Husband Went to America," like Sangappa, gives credence to the 'seize the day' motif. In this story, the lust for gold is mixed up with a more dominant passion of achieving a Ph.D. from abroad and thereby enhancing one's worldly prestige and material prospects. Rajasekhar's obsession for a Ph.D. from U.S.A., as it would offer him freedom from his drab job of a lecturer in some local college, makes him even abandon his young, innocent wife and old parents. Despite the fact that it is his wife, Girija's strong support, patience, forbearance and prayers that fetch him a foreign fellowship and get him a degree from the Princeton University, Rajasekhar gulls 'the semi-educated woman' to sign her own divorce papers.

Since he has also married an American woman and has two children by her, without any qualms, he goes to America for good. When Girija's mother suggests her to go for re-marriage, the poor girl refuses to leave her in-laws. Misfortune has taught her courage and contentment. In this way, she represents a typical Indian woman, ready to face her fate with fortitude even if she loses the much-needed support from the spouse. However, her ideal character is rather unusual in this collection which is otherwise full of morally degraded and weak-willed people. But the story, on the whole, is not unusual because most of the Indian young men going abroad remarry there enchanted by the sophisticated white ladies. Circumstances, Naikar seems to reiterate, do not make a man but reveals his true colour!

The moral lapse of degradation is at the lowest ebb in "Mother's Husband" where the author has tried to bring in the Oedipus myth with a strange twist and with little success. Instead of the son killing his father and remarrying his mother, here the mother abandons her husband and has sex with her son. The story begins keeping in mind the mythological tempo. Setavi, a flippant version of the Greek fore-teller Teresias, is 'the celestial scribe' who writes the fate of the mortals to be reborn, literally, on their foreheads. But she is shocked out of her wits to know the future of her yet to be born daughter, Kamalata, "who is going to have sexual intercourse with her own son according to the strange course of her life" (79). As it happens in reality, Kamalata, in a fit of physical passion marries a cobbler and years later, when she knows of his inferior profession, deserts him and their son.

As she is still very engaging, she slides into harlotry and changes her name to Chandrasani. Like mother, the son too is disgusted with the father's profession and becomes a young merchant dealing in precious stones and pearls. Pure chance and sheer coincidence brings the son, Adivesha, to the same town where his mother earns a living and makes him desire her celebrated beauty. As a result of their passionate lovemaking Chandrasani gives birth to a male child. Subsequently, in dream,

a woman of her mother's age shows up and admonishes her of this incestuous relationship. Unable to bear the guilt and shame, Chandrasani jumps into a well and commits suicide along with her "son-and-grandson." Deplorably, the story, despite the author's best attempt, lacks in organic growth. There has been very little said why and how Kamalata, who was so devoted to her husband and son, having had her fill of matrimonial pleasure for full five years, could leave them without a backward glance and suddenly become so degraded simply because her husband turned out to be one of the low caste men.

The obsession with wealth recurs again in "The Invisible Face," where Bangarasetty, a renowned merchant of Dharwad turns out to be an accomplice in the crime of printing fake currency notes. Bangarasetty has risked his reputation for the sake of ill-gotten wealth. But there is a double-irony at play; when there is a chance for exposure, all his partners in crime bribe the doctor in the hospital who poisons him to death. Thus, the person who should have saved the life of Bangarasetty is actually responsible for his death. So the greed for gold takes everything away from Bangarasetty. This story is a bitter expose of the widening gap between the public and the private face, between the man and the mask.

This life of intrigue takes another form in "She Wanted a Child." Here Manjula sacrifices her everything for a child of her own. This type of hankering after child is quite common in Indian society where life is supposed to be worthless without a male progeny. Manjula does not conceive during the first two years of her conjugal life and thus loses her familial and social status in the eyes of her mother-in-law and husband. Her husband, Sankara, even hints at his second marriage, compelling her to mislead him by telling a lie that she has lost her menstrual cycle and hence is expecting a child. A sudden but welcome offer of job in the Dharwad post-office as a clerk saves her from exposure for the time being. She has to leave her family and join the post where Sekhar, her young colleague, is attracted towards her. Manjula's wish for the child is now strangely mixed up with

her desire for this smart young man. They secretly meet at different places and make love passionately, yet Manjula fails to conceive. The lady doctor finally tells her that she would need a minor operation. Scared of the operation Manjula prefers an easier way out by stealing a newly born baby from the Civil Hospital. But being a novice, she is caught by the police while she is returning to her husband to impinge on him that the child is their own. The police inspector, moved by her plight and candid confession, recommends for a less severe punishment of three months imprisonment. The one improbable point of the story is the long absence of Manjula's husband who should have, in natural course, visited her very often to know about her well being, more so, when she is expecting a baby.

The sexual depravity, which is the forte of many of the stories described above, surfaces again in "Coffin in the House." It is about the rape and the resultant death of a nubile girl by an elderly man. That hapless girl is Prema and the perverted man is Mr. Patil, otherwise a very respectable man in his society. He has broken his leg and is recuperating in a hospital when his neighbour in the apartment complex finds out some unnatural sound coming out of his room. It finally turns out to be the tinkering of a coffin by a thief. The episode is narrated to Patil in the hospital by Mallikarjuna. But gradually Patil is remorse-stricken by his past guilt and confesses his crime before a stupefied friend that how his carnal desires for that young girl led to that heinous act. It appears that he tempted her by chocolates, gagged her mouth, and raped her so violently that the helpless victim died during the assault. Gradually, the news spreads from one to another and Prema's father exclaims with disgust: "We thought Mr. Patil to be the best friend of our family and could never imagine that he would do such a terrible thing. We simply cannot guess which snake lives in which hole" (159). It should be noted here that the author has used snake symbolism in an appropriate way, for serpent is always associated with sinful lust both in the eastern and the western mythology. The police arrests Mr. Patil and he has to face the punishment meted out to him by

law that he has to undergo ten years imprisonment as soon as he is discharged from the hospital. Thus he is punished for his brutal crime but at what cost to that innocent girl and her parents!

Being an academic with decades of teaching, Naikar comes to campus conspiracy in "The Anonymous Letter." The Professor and Chairman of the department of English of a University instigates the students against their own teachers by making them write repugnant letters to them collectively. Without signing any names at the bottom, these students become free in their anonymous garb to hurl abuses at them. For instance, they write :

Professor Gangadhar dictates notes and does not explain anything.

He speaks English like Kannada.

We cannot understand Dr. Balachandra's pronunciation. He cracks jokes in the class and kills time. He makes students bring cigarettes from the shop.

Professor Nagesh is a peculiar man. He never looks at the students but always stares at the ceiling. He does not tell us the meaning of Greek and Latin quotations.

Professor Sekhar is a weirdo and helps only the girls by leaking out questions to them. He comments upon his own colleagues and fails the students who are not his *chelas* (167).

This story is remarkable in this collection for its wide-ranging humour. It is also one of the two stories that is free from lust for gold or woman. Later on, the teachers find out the trick of the Chairman and make him apologise, of course, obliquely.

"When the News Came" is the other story that has a different theme. Here, the reported death of Chennappa, a truck-driver, by the police turns out to be painfully wrong. The one whose death is actually reported is alive and there is yet another by the same name who died accidentally. When the real Chennappa returns safely back to his village, after a week, he is surprised to see the fear on the faces of his people who mistake him to be his ghost. Chennappa also realises the forced widowhood of his wife and her eventual exile on account of

his (ghost's) arrival in the village. In the end, the same police who contributed to the chaos make amends by reuniting Chennappa with his family. Naikar takes another opportunity to hint at the superstitious beliefs of the poor people. And the shifting tone of humour and pathos leaves no room for sex or chase for gold.

The last story, "Fulfilment," is a usual stuff of a rich girl falling for a poor boy of low caste and then eloping with him to fulfil her physical and emotional needs. Bharati is overwhelmed by the acting prowess, combined with the physical charm, of Chandrasekhar leading to their secret love affair and subsequent marriage. She is so devoted to her husband that she willingly lives a life of poverty with him in a village. They are blessed with a son named Viswanath. But their happiness rankles in the eyes of a few others and Chandrasekhar is implicated in a criminal case. He disguises himself as a beggar and goes to Bombay to escape the dragnet of law. Bharati's father is gradually reconciled to his fate and becomes philosophical. Finally, he donates all his property to a *Math*. After twelve years, Chandrasekhar returns with beard and mustache. And for a while, even Bharati fails to recognise him. But the recognition dawns on her when she hears his voice and they live happily ever after.

In the "Preface," the author gives his preference for the Indian variety of English. He says : "Like many Commonwealth writers, I believe in the view that we Indians must write in our native brand of English and should not ape the British 'masters'. Our imagery and style should be redolent of our cultural ethos" (5). There are plenty of examples of typical English expression in the collection. For instance, when Malla hears of the countless golden ornaments, his mouth begins "to water at that news" (11). Similarly, when he succeeds in scaring everyone from the dead body of the old woman that would enable him to steal everything, he feels himself in "seventh heaven" (15). And when Balya approaches Ganga to concede Sangappa's secret wishes, she cries out in anger : "I shall have you shoe-beaten..." (39). Again she retorts to Paramma in similar

vein, "How can he think of having me as his keep?" (43). When her husband finally finds out her extramarital affair, he shouts at her, "You whore, you have blackened my face permanently and I cannot show my face to the people in the village" (53). Virabhadra, when he gets hold of Sangappa, *boils* with anger (58). When, out of ignorance, Girija signs on the divorce paper, her father-in-law, tells her in anguish, "You have dug your own grave" (76). When Rudravva is wrongly reported by the police of the death of her husband, she suddenly feels, "as if the earth under her feet was sinking" (133). She wails pitifully before her son, "My dear Chandru, your father has left us in midwater" (*Ibid.*). When Prema's father finds out the misdoing of Mr. Patil, otherwise a highly respected gentleman, he cries out in abhorrence, "We simply cannot guess which snake lives in which hole" (159). These expressions give an earthly touch of reality to these stories. In addition, there are so many references to South Indian customs, rituals, dress codes and food habits, thereby providing an extra edge of naturalness to this collection. Thus we have innumerable references of women adjusting their sarees around their breasts indicating their inherent modesty.

But this naturalness is not maintained in the structure/plot of the stories. There are unnecessary details, self-evident facts and damaging repetitions pointing to the fact that the author needs a lot of practising and polishing of his craft. Every now and then a reader is not supposed to know how *holige* and *bhajis* are prepared, *dosas* and *idlies* are eaten and beetle leaves are chewed or cigarettes are smoked. These excessive details simply distract the mind of the reader from the main theme and often reduce the tempo and smooth flow of the storyline. Moreover, if everything is told by the short story writer to the reader, then what else remains for his 'discovery'?

Printing errors are plentiful and the author should have himself proofread the final draft, particularly when this happens to be his maiden venture. There is then sexual "passion portrayed in its raw intensity."³ One wonders whether it is this overdose of sex that makes fine female critics like Prema Nandakumar to

choose only one story, "The Anonymous Letter," and discuss it at length and shy away from all the remaining stories?⁴ Nonetheless, there has been a long and controversial debate in literature as to how much sex should be put into it. D.H. Lawrence has portrayed sexual passion with a particular philosophy of life in his mind. One fails to find any such philosophy in the present collection. Even Arundhati Roy has her own share of sexual interludes in her most famous novel. Yet everything is amalgamated in the fine alchemy of her art; one solely misses this artistry in Naikar. But then, when Henry Miller was accused of putting so much of physical passion in his novels, he simply replied, "Maybe you have to wade through rivers of shit to find a germ of reality."⁵ It is equally true for this collection. One fervently hopes that Naikar would hone his craft further in subsequent collections after this apprentice work, which points to his dormant potential that needs further exploration.

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18

Portrayal of Diaspora Experiences in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*

—Tejinder Kaur

IN HER first collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*,¹ which won her the Pulitzer Prize for fiction 2000, Jhumpa Lahiri has portrayed the various experiences of the diasporas in Boston and Calcutta (now Kolkata). Lahiri was born in London of Bengali parents and grew up in Rhodes Island, U.S.A. In seven out of the nine stories in this collection, Lahiri presents the three generations of mainly Indian Bengali expatriates to America, who came to America to escape political or economic difficulties of their native land, or to study, or as professionals “as part of the brain drain”;² Indian born Americans (also called Amerindians); and their children. One story “The Real Durwan” presents the sad tale of a lower political refugee, Boori Mai, who being a Bengali was deported to Calcutta through East Bengal boarder, after the Partition. “Whether set in Boston or Bengal, these sublimely understated stories, spiced with humour and subtle detail, speak with universal eloquence to anyone who has ever felt the yearnings of exile or the emotional confusion of the outsider.”³

Before analysing the experiences and maladies of the diasporas presented in Lahiri's short stories, an attempt is being made here, with the help of the views of a few theorists on diaspora experiences and identities, to define diaspora; various hazards experienced by them in the process of settlement in the

new country; their cultural dilemmas and displacement; the generational differences; transformation in their identities with the new demands; and the new possibilities and new ways of thinking about their relations to 'the subject culture' and their homelands which can bring transformation in the received notions of diaspora identities and their modes of existence.

The word 'diaspora' has been taken from the Greek, meaning "to disperse." Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin define 'diaspora' as "the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions...."⁴ Robert Cohen describes diasporas as the communities of people living together in one country who "acknowledge that the old country — a nation often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore — always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions."⁵ Diasporas thus live in one country as community but look across time and space to another. The migrant diasporas and their descendants experience displacement, fragmentation, marginalization and discontinuity in the cultural 'discourse' of the subject countries.

Avtar Brah describes the status of diasporas in the dominant culture very appropriately by saying "...all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces, even as they are implicated in the construction of a common 'we'."⁶

This living 'in-between' condition is very painful and marginalizing for the diasporas. There is yearning for "home," to go back to "the lost origin," and "imaginary homelands"⁷ are created from the fragmentary and partial memories of their homelands. They also face cultural dilemma when their cultural practices are mocked at and there is a threat to their cultural identity. They stand bewildered and confused, and show resistance also to the discourse of power in various forms. In the following generations these confusions, problems and yearnings become less intense as they get influenced by the culture of that country and also adapt themselves to it.

No doubt, due to "the generational differences" the migrants and their children occupy different spaces in the 'representative'

culture but their experiences of feeling rootless and displaced can also be of similar nature. Though the children born to migrant peoples enjoy better settlement and place in that country but "their sense of identity borne from living in a diaspora community [is] influenced by the past migrant history of their parents or grandparents," remarks John McLeod.⁸

In course of time, diaspora individuals from the same country form communities, and different diaspora communities make "composite communities." Thus distinct diaspora communities are constructed out of "the confluence of narratives of the old country to the new, which create the sense of shared history," states Robert Cohen.⁹

During their stay in the new country and in interaction with the representative culture the subjectivities and modes of thinking of the diasporas also change and they too intervene in the cultural discourse of the dominant culture. Thus "hybrid identities" are negotiated which bring a change in the fixed traditional binary divisions such as native inhabitants/diaspora peoples, same/different, master/slave etc. and this is called "postcolonial" by Homi K. Bhabha.¹⁰ This interaction and comingling of the cultures no doubt leads to further conflicts but it certainly opens new routes and modes of thinking for the individual and group identities of diasporas and guides them to outgrow the stereotyped experiences of uprootedness, displacement and marginalization. Homi K. Bhabha, Avtar Brah, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall and a few other theorists have explored the new modes of diaspora identities and belonging because they feel that the discourses and narratives of nationalism, ethnicity or race (which are modes of belonging and place the individual in the certainty of roots) are not suited anymore to the present times where the migrants are thinking in different ways about their relations to the new "place," "home" and their past. Since there has come a considerable change in the outlook and identities of diasporas with the changed global economic, political and cultural scenario, the identities of diaspora individuals and communities cannot be placed only in relation to some

homeland to which they all want to return or at all costs must return.

Thus, the diaspora experience can be defined "not by essence or purity but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity — by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite difference, by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference," avers Stuart Hall.¹¹

Now coming to Jhumpa Lahiri, we find that in her short stories she has portrayed some of the problems engendered by the experience of migrancy and diaspora such as displacement, rootlessness, fragmentation, discrimination, marginalization and crisis in identity.

Aruti Nayar in her article "An Interpreter of Exile" rightly observes that "...Lahiri negotiates the dilemmas of the cultural spaces lying across the continents with a master's touch. Though endowed with a distinct universal appeal, her stories do bring out rather successfully the predicament of the Indians who trapeze between and across two traditions, one inherited and left behind, and the other encountered but not necessarily assimilated."¹² Apart from these experiences of the diasporas, Lahiri has also shown the way to go "beyond" these feelings and confusions and to find new ways of adaptation and thinking as per the new environment and new demands especially through her last story "The Third and Final Continent."

It is not possible to discuss in detail the portrayal of all these diaspora experiences in the scope of this paper. However, a modest attempt is being made here to highlight some of these issues brought out through the narratives of Jhumpa Lahiri.

How the diasporas face the problem of displacement, rootlessness, discrimination and marginalisation in the migrated country, even after having found a place to live in, is well illustrated in the stories "Mrs. Sen's," "Sexy" and "The Real Durwan." Mrs. Sen, an Indian Bengali (in "Mrs. Sen's") who

baby-sits Eliot, an eleven-year old boy of an American lady, in her own apartment is constantly questioned of her origin and background by his mother. Mrs. Sen's mannerism, cooked dishes which she serves to Eliot's mother as a mark of Indian hospitality are despised by Eliot's mother. Mrs. Sen feels bad and insulted many a time by her remarks and always feels restless and uneasy, though she knows her relatives in India "think I live the life of a queen..." (p. 125). Similarly, Dixits (in "Sexy") are mocked at by their American neighbours and their children are called "The Dixits dog shit" (p. 95) by the American children when standing on the other side of the road waiting for the school bus.

It is not only in America that the Indian migrants and their children undergo these humiliating and discriminatory experiences, the diasporas meet this kind of treatment in every dominant culture and in other nation. Lahiri shows this through the predicament of Boori Ma (in "The Real Durwan") who, being a Bengali, was sent to Calcutta after the Partition. Being from a lower caste, she earns her meager livelihood by cleaning the stairs and guarding the locality (the conventional roles are topsy turvyed). She is given a place by the Bengali people of those apartments to keep her belongings and sleep for the night under the letter box. Though everybody is sympathetic to her, gives her food and promises her other items every now and then yet she is considered "a refugee," "a victim of changing times" and is kept apart in the shared activities of the locality. She considers herself "an outsider," broken inside, not knowing her place in the world, and feels "burning sensation like pepper across her thinning scalp and skin, which was of a less mundane origin" (p. 75). Though she herself is a Bengali like others living in that locality and city but she faces double displacement and discrimination because (i) of being a non-Indian (ii) and belonging to a lower caste. Gayatri C. Spivak considers this caste system in India worse than "racism" in other countries and calls both India and America "bad, but in different ways."¹³

To seek a change from her routine, Boori Ma sometimes

goes to different houses in the afternoon. Though she is welcome there and sometimes "cracked tin (of tea) was passed to her direction" but "knowing not to sit on the furniture, she crouched, instead, in doorways and halfways, and observed gestures and manners in the same way a person tends to watch traffic in a foreign city" (p. 76). Thus she remains "a foreigner," "the other" not knowing which country or community is hers. Her dilemma is that she can neither go "back across the border" which was once her home nor is she given a space in this new country which was politically declared to be her home, she being a Bengali. Thus she belongs to no country, neither here, nor there. Her identity is shifted with the shifts in history and politics. Ultimately she is suspected to be the informer to the robbers and is thrown out of that place when a few things of the locality are stolen in her absence (a symbolic action of the fate met by the diasporas in the migrated country).

Feeling isolated and displaced in America, Mrs. Sen longs to return home, misses her family there, reads letters from them time and again and listens to the cassettes of Ravi Shankar. This obsessive yearning on her part makes her unsettled and does not let her identity bloom. Boori Ma too feels nostalgic of her family, her "two storey brick house, a rosewood almari, and a number of coffer boxes..." (p. 71) whose keys she still carries with her. Her repeated fictional and contradictory accounts of her house and the elaborate marriage of her daughter, and Mrs. Sen's telling Eliot's mother that "Everything is there" (p. 113) in India (Calcutta), nice fresh fish of good quality available very near to her house, show that diasporas construct imaginary happy homelands (which in reality might be the opposite) from the fragmentary odds and ends of memory, Avtar Brah calls "home" "a mythic place of desire in diasporic imagination."¹⁴

Mr. Pirzada (in the story "When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine"), who has come from Pakistan on a Government scholarship to study the deciduous trees of New Zealand, misses his wife and daughters, and while eating dinner with Lilia's parents he keeps his pocket watch "set to the local time in Dacca, eleven hours

ahead," "on his folded paper napkin on the coffee table" (p. 30). This yearning for home in the first generation immigrants is a predominating feeling. Jhumpa Lahiri in one of her interviews recounts "I've inherited my parents' preoccupations. It's hard to have parents who consider another place their home even after 30 years."¹⁵

The children of the migrants do not face the same problems because of their parents living "here now." Lilia's mother thinks that because of Lilia having "born here" in America she "was assured a safe life, an easy life, a fine education, every opportunity. (She) would never have to eat rationed food or obey curfews or watch riots from my roof-top, or hide neighbours in water tank to prevent them from being shot" (p. 26) as she and her husband had to. But we are shown through Lilia's retrospection and scarred psyche that these children carry with them the past history of 'origin' of their parents and grandparents, and are treated with an Orientalist attitude even though they are born and brought up here, read the history and geography of America in schools and have assimilated their culture. Leela feels shattered when for Halloween she goes with her friend Dora as "a witch" wearing "black capes fashioned from dyed pillow cases and conical hats and wide cardboard brims" shading their faces "green with a broken eye shadow," to different houses for collecting candy and other eatables and is called by some American neighbours in a derogatory way "an Indian witch," "never seen" "before" and is thus differentiated from Dora, the native inhabitant. She is considered an Orient (being an Indian) in the neighbourhood as well as in the school. Thus Lilia faces an identity crisis as her identity is defined in terms of the past history of her parents and the fixed notions of the western culture about Indians, and she remains "other" in that culture. Lilia's case also shows that however hard the diasporas may try to accept the education, history, values, cultures and language of the indigenous country, and paint their faces with the same colour as native inhabitants do, they are never accepted on equal terms in the subject culture (the analogy is taken from

Frantz Fanon's analysis of the black people's experiences in white culture in his *Black Skin : White Masks* 1952). Thus Lahiri shows through the pathetic narrative of Boori Ma, and Lilia's recapitulation of some memories of her and her parents' past which are impinged on her subconscious, that diasporas and their children occupy the perilous intermediate position, belonging nowhere. They are unable to indulge in the sentiments of belonging to either place.

In these stories Lahiri has also revealed that the migrants can share similarities as well as differences with their descendants in many experiences, and the relationship between the generations of diasporas need not be always forming a neat contrast rather it can be "complex and overlapping." Moreover, different migrants react differently to given situations. While settling in America, some of the diasporas of the first generation like Dev (in "Sexy") and Mr. Sen (in "Mrs. Sen's") do not grumble much and adjust themselves to the ways of life there, but some like Mrs. Sen and Dixits show resistance also. Mrs. Sen resists to the continuing agency of power of Eliot's mother insisting on her to learn driving which would facilitate her coming to Eliot's house for baby-sitting and would give her more job opportunities. Mrs. Sen starts practising driving, finding it difficult, gives it up, prefers going by bus, resumes the practice, meets with an accident and finally leaves the job accepting defeat as well as asserting her will, which shows an ambivalence in her final action, shutting herself up in her room and crying there. Thus this "dialogue of power and resistance, of refusal and acceptance" continues and ultimately she gives up defeatedly/heroically. Dixits show their resistance by observing their own rituals while celebrating the birthday of their child where the American children too are invited.

We find most of the first generation migrants facing cultural dilemma and trying their best to retain their cultural identity and cultural practices in their beliefs, values, dressing up, eating menus and habits. These "beliefs, traditions, customs, behaviours and values" along with their "possessions and belongings" are

carried by migrants with them when they arrive in "new places" observes John McLeod.¹⁶ Dixits, Mrs. and Mr. Sen, Shukumar's mother (in "A Temporary Reality"), Lilia's parents, Mr. Pirzada, Mr. Das's parents (in "Interpreter of Maladies") try to stick to the mannerism, values and beliefs of their own culture and any clash between their concept of "home" and their beliefs baffles them. In most of the second generation people these emotional links and ties with the past in most of the matters are loosened as we see in the life styles of Shukumar and Shoba in "A Temporary Reality" and of Sanjeev and Twinkle in "This Blessed House." They are alienated from Indian art and culture. In their religious beliefs some of them are more of fanatics. They mainly go by American styles in eating menus and habits, and their marital relations too are crumbling. In the story "Interpreter of Maladies" we meet Mrs. and Mr. Das (America born Indians) and their three children on their trip to India. In this "journey to home" they learn about India only through "the paper back tour book" (p. 44) or through Mrs. Kapasi's (the local tourist guide) interpretation of India to them while showing them Konarak Temple in Orissa. They don't feel "at home" in these surroundings and want to go back soon. Being groomed in American culture they face a big cultural gap in India and hence feel displaced on their parents' motherland. Thus we see that Lahiri has shown so dynamically the shifting concepts of 'home' and 'displacement' in the successive generations of migrants.

How diasporas look for the people from their country in a foreign land, or people from the countries with shared past history, and form "composite communities" is shown through the search of Lilia's parents "of compatriots" by trailing their "fingers at the start of each new semester through the columns of the University directory, circling surnames familiar to their part of the world. It was in this manner that they discovered Mr. Pirzada, phoned him and invited him "to their house (p. 24) and came closer by and by. Lilia recalls how her parents and Mr. Pirzada watched the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, bloodshed and killings on T.V. with sad hearts and shared their

feelings of past and present displacement. How the identities of the diasporas keep shifting with the "play of history, culture and power"¹⁷ at International level is also presented through the fate of Pirzada who finds himself further displaced from Pakistan, since Dacca, his home place, is now in Bangladesh (East Pakistan) and politically he would be now belonging to Bangladesh.

Lahiri also shows that most of the second generation people adjust well and make a space for themselves in the new country. Sanjeev and Twinkle forge their own identities, make their own groups comprising of diaspora couples from other countries, and a few Americans as well. Sanjeev has carved an identity for himself in American set up and is going to rise to the post of Vice-President in the firm he is working.

How the first generation migrants too can adjust well and stop lamenting the "lost origin" by making "imaginative crossings" and going "beyond" (the word 'beyond' in the title is very significant) the fixity of roots and intervening in the subject culture has been revealed in the last story "The Third and Final Continent" through the journey of the Bengali young man from Calcutta in 1964 in pursuit of a good job, his stay in England till 1969 for completing his education, his marriage in Calcutta and his final settlement in America as American citizen which he calls his 'home'. He and his wife Mala have retained their cultural identity, values and beliefs and have also changed themselves according to the requirements of the new culture, and also go to Calcutta every few years. For feeling 'at home' in America, the protagonist owes his debt to Mrs. Croft, a hundred and three years old lady in whose house he had lived on rent, which he calls his "first home" in America. Mrs. Croft liked him and called his wife "a perfect lady" and he too behaved like a son to her and mourned her death. Thus through voluntary effort he had intervened in the subject culture, influenced it, and it also transformed the relationship between him and his wife making it mobile and dialogic. His wife Mala too, instead of evoking the pain of loss and uprootedness as Mrs. Sen does, has found her

own way of amalgamating both the cultures and goes "across" the fixity of cultures, and in her turn had influenced Mrs. Croft too. He advises his son, who is studying in Harvard University, and who is exposed to the Bengali culture also at home, not to feel desolate and discouraged after graduation but with new knowledges and new ways of seeing, explore the new possibilities in the world facing the problems bravely like his father and make a place for himself in the world. This story is certainly a new narrative (rightly placed in the end) constructed to suggest the new ways of thinking and new possibilities to the migrants and their descendants showing them a way of not lamenting over the lost past and looking for the "secure roots" which "fix them in place, in a nation or an ethnic group" (A few terms are borrowed from Paul Gilroy's book *The Black Atlantic*, 1993). Rather they should continually devise for themselves new cultural "routes" which will take them imaginatively and physically to many places and into contact with many peoples and help them realise their ambitions. This will forge a new relationship between their past, present and future. In this process, the "transnational contingencies of routes" will replace the "grounded certainties of roots."

To sum up, we can say that by interpreting various maladies and experiences of the diasporas in their various nuances and manifestations, and suggesting them new possibilities, new routes and new modes of thinking and existence in the new countries in the fast changing, political, social, economic and cultural global scenario, Jhumpa Lahiri, with her first collection of short stories has secured for herself a commendable place along with other Indian diaspora writers such as Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, V.S. Naipaul, and Bharati Mukherjee.

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19

Multicultural Commitment : A Study of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*

—Bhagabat Nayak

INDIA HAS a reason to be proud of the latest recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, Jhumpa Lahiri, the first ever writer of Indian origin (a Writer of Indian diaspora) in 2000. Born of Bengali parents this young writer of short fiction is the first creative writer of Asian Origin to win the highest American Literary Award for fiction of the year 2000 for her slim collection of nine superbly crafted short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*. In the closing decades of the twentieth century some Indian English writers like Amitav Ghosh, Sashi Deshpande, Sashi Tharoor, and Uppamanyu Chatterjee, created waves at home and other like Arundhati Roy, Vikram Chandra, and Vikram Seth made inroads into the Anglo-American countries in particular and west in general by winning coveted prizes at the national and international level. Likewise, writers of Indian diaspora such as Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri have created waves in the west, and made their impact on Indian literary scene. Jhumpa Lahiri created history by winning the highest American Literary Award (i.e., Pulitzer Prize for 2000) for a Collection of Stories the roots of which lie in India. For this literary achievement she has bagged a number of awards which include O'Henry Award for the title story, Transatlantic Review Award for best fiction, Louisville Review Fiction Prize, Fellowship of Princetown's Fine Arts Work Centre

and The Newyorker's nomination among 20 best writers under 40 for the twenty-first century.

Lahiri was born in London of Bengali parents, her father a librarian and mother a teacher. She grew up in Rhode Island, U.S. and has visited her parents' home city Calcutta several times during which she had felt "every visit was an emotional see-saw across continents and cultures". As an elegant outsider and shy immigrant cinderella she had her talents and beauty from her early age modelled for 'Keo Karpin' at four for which her maternal aunt Anusua rightly comments "Jhumpa is so beautiful that she could have easily entered the Miss World Contest." (*The Times of India*, 21 April, 2000). She began her writing with a classmate during school recess harking back to the past — a nostalgic longing instilled in her heart by her mother. In course of her terminal visits to Calcutta she had become bilingual and bicultural in her linguistic acquisition and cultural assimilation. On being asked about her Calcutta roots she explains her perplexing bicultural universe in which she inhabits, the expectations and assumptions between which she always shuttles. She says, "My mother has lived outside India for nearly 35 years; My father nearly 40. Since 1969 they've made their home in the United States. But there were invisible walls erected around our home, walls intended to keep American influence at bay. Growing up, I was admonished not to "behave" like an American, or, worse to "think" of myself as one. Actually "being" an American was not an option" (*Outlook*, Collector's Edition, 2000 : 116). She also admits :

When I began writing fiction seriously, my first attempts were for some reason always set in Calcutta...a vast, unruly fascinating city so different from the small New England from where I was raised, shaped my perceptions for the world and...I learnt to observe things as an outsider and yet I knew that as different Calcutta is from Rhode Island, I belonged there in some fundamental way, in the way, I didn't seem to belong in the U.S."

(*The Times of India*, 13 April, 2000)

After her Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies from Boston University she had planned to write about her roots and origin as a struggling writer came into being after her completion of a creative writing graduate programme of Boston University. Being "homesick" in her literary sensation and diasporic in her immigration she thinks of the question of her identity as a difficult one and yet feels that she belongs to the vast fascinating metropolis called Calcutta. A sense of isolation and state of immigration make her identity a baffling question. It appears :

She is much more American than her parents. Yet it is never easy for those with her background to completely feel American either. She explains that for older generation of immigrants the challenges of exile, loneliness, sense of alienation are more acute than they are for their children. For the latter, especially those who have strong ties to their country of origin, like her, is that they feel neither one thing or the other. And in her stories, her characters move constantly between two worlds grappling bravely with this cultural displacement.

(*The Times of India*, 17 April, 2000)

Her stories in this collection are set in India and America and establish a certain Indo-American cultural link, in the postcolonial context. She has chronicled her characters' lives with both objectivity and compassion while charting the emotional temperature of their lives with tactile precision. She has made a search for identity with an emotional empathy through her protagonists in most of her stories who are busy like her doing research and completing their dissertations. Therefore, the jury on the Pulitzer Committee have chosen the book for the prize for her transcontinental cultural consciousness and her diasporic identity.

Lahiri had an interesting story to tell about the title of *Interpreter of Maladies*. She recalls the time when as a graduate student of Boston University she ran into a "friend's friend" who explained that he was "interpreting" ailments for a doctor who had numerous Russian patients. By the time she reached home she admits she had the phrase "interpreter of maladies" planted

in her head and decided to write a story with that title. None of her stories in the book is "apprentice work". Sumit Mitra and Arthur J. Pais write how a quite "prolific range of narrative technique that help her get at the inner weave of characters with unexpected twists in plots and situations" (*India Today*, Vol. XXV, 17 Nov., 2000 : 74).

In the Lahiri family map, the immigrants are a four member family where Jhumpa and her younger sister Simanti have no brothers for which perhaps some of her stories have been written with a longing for male members. It appears more "liberating" to write for her from such a studied view — she enjoyed the experience so much that she wrote three stories in a row from the male point of view. This enhances the probability whether it will be a continuation of the theme of her short stories interspersed with different cultures and human conditions that have universal resonance. She agrees that there is less of a cultural divide between American and India due to greater communication and access, although she has observed a "sense of emotional exile" in her parents. In American tradition the word "universal" has traditionally had a limited connotation. Collision between Europe and America, as in Henry James' novels is universal enough but in American social landscape Lahiri enjoys her life without a safety net of community support and individual relationships that turns freedom a mockery. Unwittingly Lahiri traces this tragedy in which all immigrants play their part in their Pan-American situation.

Lahiri is an Indian by ancestry, British by birth, American by immigration and targets the western audience by deliberately portraying the Indian-American life. This sense of freedom is one of the greatest thrills of writing fiction for her and she discovered her authorial freedom by publishing her debut book. By discussing her private sphere of creative power one may copiously categorise her as an American author, as an Indian-American author, as a British born author, as an immigrant author, and as an ABCD author (ABCD stands for American born confused "desi" which describes culturally challenged

second generation Indians raised in the U.S.). To Indian academics she has written something known as "diaspora fiction" and to the US academics "immigrant fiction" and this kind of demarcation amuses her. The book depicts the ordinary people, written in simple, unpretentious manner, often evocative of the stories written in Bengal in the forties and fifties. All the nine stories in the book do not have any psychedelic passage or purple prose and no mists of magic realism.

Lahiri was influenced by William Trevor, Mavis Gallant, Joyace and Chekov who had initiated her literary baptism but it changed her perceptions during her frequent visits to Calcutta. The earliest story in her book, 'A Real Durwan' was written soon after her return from India in 1992, in her bedroom in her parents' house in Rhode Island. This story with another, 'The Treatment of Bibi Halдар' have the setting in India. To the Indian readers it appears as if both the stories express a "tunnel vision" of India which she defends :

"My own experience of India was largely that of a tunnel imposed by the single city we ever visited, by the handful of homes we stayed in, by the fact that I was not allowed to explore this city on my own. Still within these narrow confines, I felt that I had seen enough of life, enough details and drama, to set stories on Indian soil."

(*Outlook*, Collector's Edition, 2000 : 117)

In 'Real Durwan' it is felt that she has "misrepresented the plumbing technologies" of Calcutta and narrating the life and experiences of Boori Ma, a sweeper. She is under the impression that "all houses in Calcutta have sinks". Lahiri narrates the life story of an East Bengal refugee, Boori Ma who in spite of her proud and prestigious past serves in a flat, satisfies the residents who are over jealous of one another's success and glory. She gains their favour by her sincere duty and faithfulness but becomes a victim of their anger with the theft of a basin from the flat and loses her job and the residents go for searching a real durwan. But in 'Treatment of Bibi Halдар' she presents the hysteric suffering of a thirty-year old lower middle class woman.

Bibi has an unknown cause of suffering. When Bibi has not been cured by the friends, priests, palmists, gem therapists, prophets, fools, allopaths, ayurvedics, hypnotists and holy water from seven holy rivers it is felt "Bibi's life was an encounter with one fruitless antidote after another" (159) "Bibi has caused enough worry, added enough to expenses, sullied enough the family name" (163). It was "...apparent that Bibi wanted a man. She wanted to be spoken for, protected, placed on her path in life" (160). The thought of a husband and marriage would cure her but her family thought her 'a liability and a loss'. But her problem is solved when she becomes a mother without marriage. Bibi never reveals the identity of the man with whom she perhaps had one night tryst but this cured her deliriousness. Thus, both the stories remind one of some of Amit Chaudhuri's writings which deal with the Calcutta commoner's life.

Lahiri's tryst in the transcontinental cultural matrix has made her conscious of her Indian diasporic identity which she admits, "I...lack the cultural ambidexterity to write about Indian life and characters in an authentic way. I have been accused of setting stories in India as a device in order to woo western audiences with exotica" (*Outlook*, Collector's Edition, 2000 : 118). Reviewers and critics are of the view that she has only written about Bengalis in India which is "an unwise decision". But some of her stories are set in Orissa and Jaipur in Rajasthan which clearly disprove the critics' allegation. In her story 'When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine' she shows Mr. Pirzada's cultural identity with India though he is a Bangladeshi. The very important issue in the story is that man can divide the country, state and land surface but not culture. The complicacies of Indo-Pak diplomacy has given birth to Bangladesh but Indo-Bangla cultural relation is not severed for which Mr. Pirzada, a Daccan expresses his happiness over Indian official's announcement, "unless the world helped to relieve the burden of East Pakistani refugees, India would have to go to war against Pakistan" (36). The story is a turning point in Lahiri's career because for the first time she made her protagonist an Indian-American who lives in

New England. The story seems to be a moving account of a family guest, Mr. Pirzada who has returned to Dacca after his research work and Bangladesh's limping back to parliamentary democracy.

'A Temporary Matter' and 'This Blessed House' have Indian and American background. In the former story a young couple have fallen out of love and are playing hide and seek with each other. Shukumar, the protagonist prepares his dissertation and goes to attend a conference in Baltimore, Sobha gives birth to a still born child, again it has to be a caesarean. Both of them have avoided each other and though Sobha had become pregnant they had never photographed, stopped attending parties, went nowhere together, not confessed their feeling and disappointments, not exchanged ideas since their marriage day till the birth of their son — their relationship continued to be formal. In 'Blessed House', Lahiri has become a big nostalgic about Indian names of her characters like Twinkle and Sanjeev who express their valuable opinion on education that "it's an attempt to convert people" (138). Her frequent referring of the names of Bollywood actress and some romantic moments which her "Twinkle confessed that she was charmed by the way Sanjeev had dutifully refilled her tea cup during their conversation" (143) in a restaurant. The story presents beauty, solemnity and dignity in the blessed house which seems to be contrary to her 'A Temporary Matter'.

In 'sexy', Miranda's infatuation with a Bengali, Devajit Mitra a married and unavoidable lover is expressed in no uncertain terms. Miranda was interested in Devajit with a mixed parentage; who came from Bengal a state in India, "a bay below and mountains above" (85) and Dev was attracted towards her for she was, "the first woman I've known with legs this long" (89). In their weeklong relationship they have kissed, praised and met each other remembering the Tajmahal, "the most romantic spot on earth", "an everlasting monument to love" (92). Miranda got elated in ecstasy of their union when Dev whispered to her "you're sexy" (91) though he had admitted

before her that his wife resembled a Bollywood actress, Madhuri Dixit.

Lahiri's 'Mrs. Sen' presents a heart-tugging story of an immigrant who works like a baby-sitter. Mrs. Sen is an Indian but Lahiri describes her American position who faces a lot of problems in adjustment. Mrs. Sen is a housewife and the wife of a university professor, looks after an office going American Woman's child at home and tries to learn how to drive. She has her typically Bengali likeness for fish. She likes to cut it with a blade, "curved like the prow of a Viking ship, sailing to battle in distant sea" (114) which she had brought from India. She becomes ecstatic when a blue aerogram with "stamps showing a bald man of a spinning wheel and blackened by postmarks" arrives from Calcutta. She has been living in America for several years but never likes to leave her cultural inheritance — wears a sari, coral glass, golden bangles, vermilion paste in her parting of hair, chops vegetables and fish with a typical Indian household blade, has love for different types of fishes and uses "a green and black bed cover printed with rows of elephants bearing Palanquins on their backs" (115). Even when she tells home it means India and her apartment room looks "that's all...is India" (113) for which the little boy Eliot was thinking of her violating some unspoken rule. Expressing Mrs. Sen's likeness for fish Lahiri writes :

"She had grown up eating fish twice a day. She added that in Calcutta people ate fish first thing in the morning, last thing before bed, as a snack after school if they were lucky. They ate the tail, the eggs, even the head. It was available in any market, at any hour, from dawn until midnight" (123-24).

But her thoughts and attempts at self-Americanisation end in tears and silence during her driving when "she was so startled by the horn that she lost control of the wheel and hit a telephone pole on the opposite corner" (134). It appears that Mrs. Sen is modelled on author's mother who had accompanied her husband abroad "in search of fish, fresh and whole in the alien markets of the west".

In her title story, 'Interpreter of Maladies' Lahiri narrates the 'pain' and 'guilt' of a woman and sketches the character of Mr. Kapasi in a realistic and convincing way. Mr. Kapasi is an interpreter assistant to a doctor by occupation and tourist guide by profession. Being a "doctor's assistant" he translates and interprets the symptoms, pains and suffering of Gujarati patients to a local doctor. Mr. Kapasi had a long desire to be an interpreter thinking of its wider prospect of "being an interpreter for diplomats and dignitaries, resolving conflicts between people and nations, settling disputes of which he alone could understand both sides" (52). While he guides a Bengali-American couple to visit the Konark Temple his sensuous infatuation with Mrs. Das intoxicated him by the sight of her bare legs and short skirts. This is further condensed when he has interpreted Surya's beauty and power in different postures in the niches of the temple facades. On the other hand, Mrs. Das has become hopeful enough that Mr. Kapasi's revealing of his professional acumen will help enough to bring a malady to her secret pain in which she has been silently suffering for the last eight years.

While visiting Khandagiri, Mrs. Das was worried about the safety of her children because of the menace of the monkeys. She was less concerned about Bobby as he was not her husband's son. Bobby was the son of her husband's friend, a Punjabi gentleman who had come to stay with them for a week and he had made love to her in one afternoon when he learnt that a London based pharmaceutical company had hired him. This guilt consciousness has made her suffer for the last eight years and this has made her sick. She says, "for eight years I haven't been able to express this to anybody, not to friends, certainly not to Raj. He doesn't even suspect it. He thinks I'm still in love with him" (65). She estimates Mr. Kapasi in belief and confidence and tells him, "I told you because of your talents" (65). She thinks that Mr. Kapasi would be able enough to bring a remedy for this terrible silent suffering by interpreting some kind of maladies. But for Mr. Kapasi it is a novel kind of case study to interpret remedy for such a suffering and he

became very serious how to resolve this common, trivial and secret matter. Mrs. Das's seeking of Mr. Kapasi's help is a kind of searching for expiation of her soul from guilt. She has realised anything secret in sex other than her husband is unhealthy. He knows that it is his noble and honest self to interpret and assist her in bringing out a malady. So he desires to mediate between them to cure her 'guilt' and 'pain'. But when Bobby is attacked by a host of monkeys on their return to the car he is rescued by Mr. Kapasi. Mr. Kapasi has exhibited his honesty and nobility and expressed his compassion for Mr. Das's suffering.

'The Third and Final Continent' is Lahiri's last story in the collection presents a Bengali gentleman's search for identity in three continents. The protagonist has sailed to London from Calcutta by an Italian Cargo Vessel, SS Roma for higher study. He struggles hard for his study and for a job and finally joins in Dewey Library of MIT, Boston. The Indian has crossed the seas alone to make his fortune in Europe and America. He says "still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have travelled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination" (198). He speaks Bengali with his wife when she arrives there in the same manner he speaks English with Mrs. Croft, his one time landlady in America who was always liking to listen from him "Splendid" success of the Americans that "there is an American Flag on the Moon!" (179). His searching for maladies in America with Mrs. Croft, his wife and son are many but he fears that his son will no longer speak Bengali after he and his wife die and it will be a "linguistic loss". Yet he encourages his son "if I can survive on three continents, then there is no obstacle he cannot conquer" (197-98) and "while the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years" (198).

The perennial question is put to Lahiri, "where are you from?" If she says she is from Rhode Island "people are seldom satisfied", since they want to know more about her name and

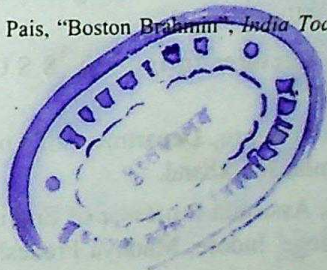
appearance. If she says she's from India, that is not entirely accurate either because she was not born there nor has she lived there. Her search for identity is difficult and that is why she makes a multicultural commitment. Her characters' search for self-recognition has a kind of autobiographical element (or authorial intention) which interests the readers.

Lahiri is profusely praised for her nine well-knit stories in which she portrays the characters drawn from all over the world — *i.e.*, from India, U.S.A., U.K. and other Commonwealth countries in their own situation. These immigrant characters are mostly psychedelic and they struggle for identity and commitment to life in the multicultural milieu of Bengal, Boston and the beyond. I would like to close with Amy Tan's remark that "Jhumpa Lahiri is the kind of writer who makes you want to grab the next person you see and say, ...she's a dazzling story teller with distinctive voice, an eye for nuance, an ear for irony" (Blurb of the book).

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